Message from the Chairman

Ryan Fields, MD, professor of surgery, as chief of the Section of Surgical Oncology, which was formerly named the Section of Endocrine and Oncologic Surgery. Ryan fills the vacancy left by the death of Jeffrey Moley, MD, known for his pioneering research and mentoring of young faculty and trainees.

Ryan, an alum of our general surgery residency himself, has helped many young residents identify their investigative niches as director of resident research. He is also co-leader of the Solid Tumor Therapeutics Program at Siteman Cancer Center. Ryan is at the leading edge of cancer research with an NIH-funded lab focusing on the biology and genetics of cancer metastases and novel models to study cancer biology and immunobiology.

In the same section, two faculty members have received endowed professorships: Rebecca Aft, MD, PhD, has been chosen to become the inaugural holder of the newly established Jeffrey F. Moley Professorship in Endocrine and Oncologic Surgery; and William Gillanders is the second Mary Culver Professor of Surgery (the first is held by Mary Klingensmith, MD). Both are outstanding researchers and are richly deserving of these professorships.

In recent months, two of our transplant programs reached incredible milestones after years of saving and transforming patient lives. The Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Hospital Transplant Program performed their 10,000th transplant in February, 56 years after the first (kidney) transplant was performed at the hospital. Just two weeks before, heart surgeons at St. Louis Children’s Hospital performed their 500th transplant and became the first program in the Midwest, and one of just a handful across the nation, to reach the milestone.

Along with milestones, there are beginnings. The Department has launched a Leadership Learning Series for young faculty aimed at helping them grow as leaders in the operating room, clinic, lab and office. It also helps build a foundation as they grow into other leadership positions in their career. And Piroska Kopar, MD, is taking our leadership positions in their career. And Piroska Kopar, MD, is taking our historical prominence in ethics and moving it forward in new ways. She is in the early stages of creating the Center for Humanism and Ethics in Surgical Specialties (CHESS), which will lead both internal and national initiatives to shape a curriculum specific to surgical training in ethics.

Timothy J. Eberlein, MD, William K. Bixby Professor of Surgery Chairman, Department of Surgery Director, Alvin J. Siteman Cancer Center

Ryan Fields named chief of renamed Section of Surgical Oncology

Ryan Fields, MD, a noted cancer surgeon and researcher, has been named chief of the Section of Surgical Oncology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

Dr. Fields, who joined the faculty in 2011, is also an associate program director and director of resident research in the general surgery residency.

A professor of surgery, Dr. Fields treats patients with liver tumors, pancreatic cancer, gastric cancer, sarcoma and melanoma at Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine. He also co-leads the Melanoma and Cutaneous Oncology Program, and the Solid Tumor Therapeutics Program.

"Dr. Fields is a truly exceptional physician-scientist," said Timothy J. Eberlein, MD, the Bixby Professor, head of the Department of Surgery and director of Siteman Cancer Center. "He is an extraordinary leader and will advance our surgical oncology program to its full potential. We are thrilled to have his leadership in our department and our cancer center."

Dr. Fields’ research is focused on the identification and treatment of patients at high risk for recurrence of cancer, and the use of cutting-edge treatments to improve survival. He runs a translational research laboratory funded by the National Institutes of Health. His lab focuses...
Dr. Aft and Dr. Gillanders awarded professorships recognizing their key contributions to cancer research

Two distinguished faculty in the Section of Surgical Oncology have been named to endowed chairs in the Department of Surgery

Rebecca Aft, MD, PhD, has been chosen to become the inaugural holder of the newly established Jeffrey F. Moley Professorship in Endocrine and Oncologic Surgery.

A prominent national breast cancer researcher, Dr. Aft has focused on characterizing disseminated tumor cells in breast cancer, which are the presumed intermediaries in the development of metastases. Her research is funded by the National Institutes of Health and The Siteman Cancer Center.

Dr. Aft specializes in cancer surgery with an emphasis on breast cancer. She received a doctoral degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a medical degree from Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. She joined the faculty at Washington University after completing a surgery residency at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. She is currently on staff at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and the John Cochran Veterans Administration Hospital and divides her time between clinical practice and translational research.

William Gillanders, MD, vice chair of research, was named the Mary Culver Professor of Surgery.

Dr. Gillanders, research vice chair since 2012, is a leading national researcher in breast cancer biology and cancer vaccine development. He and Washington University colleagues were the first to study the mammaglobin-A protein in breast cancer and elicit an immune response to it, then develop the vaccine based on that work.

Dr. Gillanders and Robert Schreiber, PhD, of the Department of Pathology and Immunology, are now testing neoantigen vaccines in patients with triple negative breast cancer, and also have developed a personalized pancreas cancer vaccine. Dr. Gillanders will lead the study of the development of breast cancer in the NIH Human Tumor Atlas Network.

“Will has advanced our understanding of how to use the immune system to target cancer cells and normal cells, and strongly supports research development, including the work of promising young faculty,” says Dr. Eberlein.

Dr. Gillanders specializes in breast and thyroid cancer surgery. He received a medical degree at Duke University in Durham, N.C., and completed a surgery residency here, before joining the faculty at the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. He came here in 2005, and is co-leader of the Tumor Immunology Program at the Siteman Cancer Center.

Dr. Gillanders holds the second Mary Culver Professor of Surgery; the first was awarded to Mary Klingensmith, MD, vice chair of education, in 2010.

Dr. Fields from page 1 on the biology and genetics of cancer metastases and novel models to study cancer biology and immunobiology.

Dr. Fields came to the School of Medicine in 2003 as a general surgery resident at Barnes-Jewish Hospital. He then completed a research fellowship in surgery and immunology, and was a resident and chief resident in general surgery. He completed a surgical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. He earned his medical degree from Duke University, and bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan, where he was mentored in cancer immunology and biology.

The section formerly was led by Jeffrey Moley, MD, who was internationally known for his contributions in thyroid cancer and surgical oncology. Dr. Moley died Oct. 15, 2017.

— Jim Goodwin, Siteman Cancer Center
Laurie Punch receives Gerry and Bob Virgil Ethic of Service Award

Laurie Punch, MD, associate professor of surgery in the Section of Acute and Critical Care Surgery, is one of seven recipients of the 2019 Gerry and Bob Virgil Ethic of Service Award. She received the award at a Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement ceremony on April 17.

The award is given annually to recognize a select group of WashU community members who exemplify a character of service and contribution to the St. Louis region. The award committee defines service to community in many different ways, but values common characteristics such as compassion; dedication to a social, cultural or economic issue; and creating a positive impact on the St. Louis community.

After joining the faculty in 2016, Dr. Punch immersed herself in understanding the city’s history and current challenges, then took steps to lessen the impact of gun violence as both a trauma surgeon and community advocate for bleeding control.

She spends time at bedside helping patients and their loved ones understand their situation and outlines the physical and emotional recovery process. Outside the hospital walls, she organized Power4STL, a non-profit organization that aims to reduce harm from violence through community health outreach. The organization has taught over 3,000 people life-saving bleeding control skills and has empowered them to change the narrative surrounding violence from one of helplessness to self-agency and resilience.

Steven Strasberg receives Barnes-Jewish Hospital Lifetime Achievement ‘Master Physician’ award

Steven Strasberg, MD, the Pruett Professor of Surgery and Carl Moyer Departmental Teaching Coordinator in the Section of Hepatobiliary-Pancreatic and GI (HPB-GI) Surgery, received the 2019 Barnes-Jewish Hospital Medical Staff Lifetime Achievement “Master Physician” Award at the Medical Staff Association semi-annual general meeting on April 11.

Established in 2012, the award is given annually to honor physicians who have provided superlative service and elite-level commitment for 25 years or more at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and its predecessor institutions.

Dr. Strasberg joined the department in 1992 after receiving a medical degree, completing a residency and research fellowship, and serving on the faculty at the University of Toronto. He also completed a research fellowship at Boston University. He founded and headed the Washington University Section of HPB-GI Surgery from 1992-2007.

Dr. Strasberg is known for developing the Critical View of Safety method of identifying anatomic structures during cholecystectomy. He introduced the method in 1995 to reduce bile duct injuries when laparoscopic cholecystectomy was first introduced. The Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons (SAGES) used it as part of a nationwide initiative to reduce injuries in performing cholecystectomy. He was also awarded the American Surgical Association Medallion for the Advancement of Surgical Care, the Lifetime Achievement Award – The Gold Medallion of the International Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Association. He also is a past president of the group.
10,000 and counting! Transplant Center reaches major milestone

The Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Transplant Center’s surgical and medical teams performed their 10,000th adult organ transplant in January 2019. The transplant center, which recently celebrated 56 years of life-saving transplants, is the 12th largest in the nation (by volume) and is renowned for excellent patient outcomes.

The 10,000th adult organ transplanted was a kidney from a living donor. The recipient who received the organ was identified through the hospital’s internal paired exchange program. Sometimes a patient has a willing donor, but their organs are not compatible. The transplant center compares other donor/recipient pairs experiencing the same situation until they find a perfect match for a paired exchange.

Barnes-Jewish’s transplant center also participates in national paired exchanges, and has participated in some of the largest transplant chains in the country.

The kidney transplant program accounts for more than half of all the transplants performed by the transplant center since 1963. “Very few programs nationwide have performed 10,000 transplants,” says Gene Ridolfi, RN, administrative director of the transplant center.

According to the United Network for Organ Sharing, nearly 114,000 people are waiting for an organ, and a new person joins the list every ten minutes. “It is a tremendous honor to know we have impacted countless lives through transplants and life-saving surgeries,” says William Chapman, MD, surgical director of the transplant center.

St. Louis Children’s Heart Center transplants 500th patient, has highest volume in Midwest

The St. Louis Children’s and Washington University Heart Center is now the first pediatric heart transplant program in the Midwest, and one of just a handful of centers across the nation, to reach the milestone of 500 heart transplants. The heart center performed one of the Midwest’s first pediatric heart transplants in 1986 and has since then consistently performed the highest volume of pediatric heart transplants of any program in the Midwest.

Twelve-year-old Anary Suazo of Tulsa, Oklahoma, is recovering well after becoming the Heart Center’s 500th heart transplant patient on January 23. Anary was born with only half of her heart fully developed and working properly. She had three open heart surgeries in her first two years of life and did well until experiencing a setback last year. Anary told her parents she wanted to fight, so the heart center team listed her for transplant. After about six months on the waiting list and a 10-hour surgery performed by Pirooz Eghtesady, MD, PhD, chief of pediatric cardiothoracic surgery and Emerson Chair in Pediatric Cardiothoracic Surgery at St. Louis Children’s Hospital, Anary is doing well.

Today, the St. Louis Children’s and Washington University Heart Center averages 15-20 heart transplants per year, including 17 heart-only transplants and 2 heart-lung transplants in 2018.
Ira Kodner receives BJH President’s Achievement Award

Washington University Emeritus Professor of Surgery Ira Kodner, MD, received the 2018 President’s Achievement Award this past December from the Foundation for Barnes-Jewish Hospital.

The award recognizes some of the most accomplished physicians worldwide known for advancing medical knowledge, improving practices and delivering care in a respectful and compassionate way, says Bob Cannon, president of Barnes-Jewish Hospital and group president of BJC HealthCare. “Dr. Kodner epitomizes all of the award’s criteria, and then some.”

Dr. Kodner, who retired in 2013, is the founder and first chief of the Section of Colon and Rectal Surgery at Washington University and Barnes-Jewish Hospital. Dr. Kodner held the Solon and Bettie Gershman Endowed Chair in Colon and Rectal Surgery for 28 years.

In addition, the Barbara and Ira J. Kodner MD Endowed Fund for Surgical Ethics was established to honor Dr. Kodner and his wife, Barbara. Dr. Kodner instituted multiple innovative programs throughout his career, including the Washington University program in medical ethics and the palliative care program. The endowed fund will help ensure further growth in this area. “My work in ethics has been one of the most glorious, productive parts of my career, and Barbara and I are honored that ethics education and research will continue in our names,” Dr. Kodner says.

Alison Snyder-Warwick wins ASPN Traveling Fellowship Award

Plastic surgeon Alison Snyder-Warwick, MD, has received the 2019 Inaugural Traveling Fellowship from the American Society for Peripheral Nerve (ASPN) Education Committee. Created by ASPN leadership to foster education and mentorship in the peripheral nerve surgery field, the fellowship provides Dr. Snyder-Warwick with the opportunity to travel to centers of excellence in the United States and abroad.

Dr. Snyder-Warwick has already traveled to the University of Michigan, where she learned about electrophysiological testing in muscle and live imaging techniques for the neuromuscular junction. She is also hoping to go to Brazil to learn a technique for dynamic eye closure and plans to travel to Boston and some additional sites. At the conclusion of the fellowship, Dr. Snyder-Warwick will present a summary of her experiences at the 2020 ASPN Annual Meeting.

Resident Tara Semenkovich receives STS President’s Award

General surgery resident Tara Semenkovich, MD, MPH, received the President’s Award at the Society of Thoracic Surgeons 55th Annual Meeting in January 2019, held in San Diego. The award is designed to recognize a resident or young investigator lead author for submitting the best scientific abstract to the Annual Meeting Program.

Dr. Semenkovich’s oral presentation was titled “Adjuvant Treatment for Node-Positive Esophageal Cancer After Induction Therapy and Surgery Improves Survival: A Multisite Study” and focused on best practices for treating patients with locally advanced esophageal cancer.

Dr. Semenkovich couldn’t be in attendance due to the very recent birth of her daughter, so she presented remotely at the meeting. General Thoracic Surgery Chief Bryan Meyers, MD, MPH, the Patrick and Joy Williamson Professor of Surgery, accepted the award on her behalf.

Brad Warner on grant to study lymphatic remodeling in short gut syndrome

Brad Warner, MD, the Jessie L. Ternberg, MD, PhD Distinguished Professor of Pediatric Surgery and chief of Pediatric Surgery, is coinvestigator with Pathology and Immunology researcher Gwendalyn Randolph, PhD, on a National Institutes of Health R01 grant to study lymphatic remodeling and transport of dietary fats in short gut syndrome (SGS). SGS is a condition that can arise after the surgical removal of a large part of the small intestine and cause fatty liver disease. Dr. Warner’s lab is testing a hypothesis involving the travel of intestinal high-density lipoproteins (referred to as “good cholesterol”) to the vein carrying blood to the liver, causing the onset of intestinal failure-associated liver disease.

Christian Frye wins STS Scholarship

Public Health Sciences researchers awarded Siteman grants

Two public health sciences researchers have been awarded Siteman Cancer Center Investment Program awards, which support and accelerate innovation in cancer research.

Yin Cao, ScD, MPH, and James, PhD, MPH, associate professor of surgery, whose work focuses on health disparities in cancer prevention and control, is principal investigator of a project to develop a multi-level intervention to improve colon cancer screening and follow-up in primary care clinics in rural Southern Illinois.

Yin Cao, ScD, MPH, assistant professor of surgery, is principal investigator on a project that will look at better understanding the relationship between bacteria in one’s oral cavity and a person’s future risk of developing Barrett’s esophagus and esophageal adenocarcinoma.

Weight Loss Surgery Program now accredited for adolescent surgery

The Washington University Weight Loss Surgery Program is now accredited for adolescent bariatric surgery as an American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBBS) Bariatric Surgery Center of Excellence. It is the first ASMBBS-accredited center for adolescent bariatric surgery in St. Louis, and will offer bariatric surgery to qualifying patients 15 and older.

Accreditation by the ASMBBS means that the surgical program meets the committee’s best practice updates for pediatric/adolescent weight loss surgery. The goal of adolescent bariatric surgery is prevention of early obesity and related mortality and morbidity from conditions that can accompany obesity such as diabetes mellitus, nonalcoholic fatty liver disease and cardiovascular disease.

J. Chris Eagon, MD, and Shaina Eckhouse, MD, perform gastric bypass and sleeve gastrectomy for adolescents in the Washington University Weight Loss Surgery Program.

Michael Brunt president-elect of Central Surgical Association

Michael Brunt, MD, chief of the Section of Minimally Invasive Surgery, is the 2019-2020 president-elect of the Central Surgical Association.

The association was founded in 1940 for surgical leaders in the central region of the United States, but is expanding its membership outside of those borders. Dr. Brunt is a past president of the Society of American Gastrointestinal and Endoscopic Surgeons and has also been a leader in national surgical education.

Emily Onufer wins AAP Rosenkrantz award

General surgery research resident Emily Jean Onufer, MD, MPH, won the 2018 Rosenkrantz Research Award from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) Section on Surgery for her work in Dr. Brad Warner’s lab. The award goes to the researcher with the best basic science presentation and paper. Dr. Onufer studies lymphatic remodeling and its effect on intestinal failure-associated liver disease in the setting of massive small bowel resection.

Amy Moore gains national attention for nerve transfer surgery

Amy Moore, MD, associate professor of surgery, received coverage from CBS and other media nationwide for performing nerve transfer surgery on 8-year-old Brandon Noblitt, who suffers from a rare disorder called acute flaccid myelitis (AFM).

The polio-like illness was making headlines as cases increased dramatically. Believed to be caused by a virus, it attacks the spinal cord and can cause muscle weakness and paralysis in previously healthy children. Surgeons at Shriners Hospital for Children – Philadelphia performed nerve transfer surgery to improve function in Brandon’s arm. They referred him to Dr. Moore to restore function in the lower extremities.

Dr. Moore and plastic surgeon Thomas Tung, MD, performed nerve transfer surgery to stabilize his hip. AFM prevented him from standing and walking, so Dr. Moore transferred an extra nerve from the area that controls the movement to the toes to the area key to allowing his hip muscle to activate. She also moved extra nerves from his abdomen to his leg so it could once again straighten. She has now performed the surgery on 15 children with AFM.

From left) Jayme Sparkman, ANP-BC, and Shaina Eckhouse, MD, apply an antiseptic to a bariatric patient’s stomach.

Amy Moore, MD

Emily Onufer, MD

Amy Moore gains national attention for nerve transfer surgery on 8-year-old Brandon Noblitt, who suffers from a rare disorder called acute flaccid myelitis (AFM).
Amy Moore named PSF Visiting Professor, joins AAHS Board

Amy Moore, MD, associate professor of surgery, was selected to serve as the 2019-2020 Visiting Professor by the Plastic Surgery Foundation (PSF). With this visiting professorship opportunity, plastic surgery programs from across the country can apply to have Dr. Moore visit their institution and give lectures to their residents and faculty members. She will accept five locations to visit.

The PSF supports the research and activities of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the largest plastic surgery specialty organization in the world.

Dr. Moore was also elected to the Board of Directors for the American Association for Hand Surgery (AAHS). She will serve in the role of parliamentarian from January 2019 to January 2020. She has been an active member of the organization since 2009, serving on multiple committees.

Bettina Drake awarded DOD grant

Bettina Drake, PhD, MPH, associate professor of surgery, has been awarded a U.S. Department of Defense Prostate Cancer Research Program grant to study “Treatment Options and Survival of Metastatic Prostate Cancer Patients.” The project will look at a prostate cancer cohort from VA hospitals to explore the survival benefit among men diagnosed with metastatic prostate cancer who receive definitive treatment compared to men who receive non-definitive treatment. The study will then assess the treatments’ side effects that can affect quality of life. In this increasingly younger population with a 30 percent survival rate, a population-based analysis is critical to develop educational materials, treatment decision aids and implementation studies that build on the lessons learned from this and other studies.

Esther Lu wins ICTS grant

Esther Lu, PhD, assistant professor of surgery, received a Washington University Institute of Clinical and Translational Sciences (ICTS) grant to promote the translation of scientific discoveries to implementation science through a stepped-wedge statistical design.

Doug Brown receives ASE Clerkship Award

Surgical Education Specialist Douglas Brown, PhD, has received the Association for Surgical Education (ASE) Clerkship Coordinator Recognition Award for his management of the third-year medical students’ surgery clerkship at Washington University School of Medicine. This competitive award recognizes a single surgery clerkship coordinator each year who has demonstrated exemplary performance. The individual is nominated by the home institution’s faculty, and students, and is selected by the ASE awards committee.

Dr. Brown has managed the surgery clerkship, directed by Michael Awad, MD, PhD, since 2011. He also worked under John Kirby, MD, who led the clerkship from 2009 to 2018. “This is certainly a nice capstone to Dr. Brown’s clerkship tenure as he retires from that role this spring,” says Dr. Awad.

The clerkship affords medical students the opportunity to take part in clinical rotations within the Department of Surgery and gain some exposure to other surgery-related disciplines outside the department. Dr. Brown will retire in May 2019.

Former Department Chair Samuel Wells Jr. speaks on contributors to organ transplant at Grand Rounds

Professor Emeritus Samuel Wells Jr., MD, who served as chair of the Washington University Department of Surgery from 1981 to 1997, spoke on “Major Contributors to the Success of Organ Transplantation” to a full Holden Auditorium at Transplant Center Grand Rounds on December 20, 2018. Joining Dr. Wells, third from right, are (l-r) Abdominal Transplant Surgery Chief William Chapman, MD; thoracic surgeon G. Alexander Patterson, MD; and Lung Transplant Surgery Program Director Daniel Kreisel, MD, PhD. Behind them is a slide of a statue of Thomas Starzl, MD, who performed the first human liver transplants and is referred to as “the father of modern transplantation.”
2018-2019 Leadership Series shortens learning curve for young faculty

Every Department of Surgery faculty member is a leader in the operating room, clinic, lab and/or research office. Many go on to leadership positions in a division or section, national organization or chair in another department of surgery.

The department’s 2018-19 Leadership Learning Series seeks to shorten the learning curve for 17 young faculty members as they develop their research and practice areas, and begin to move toward national leadership positions in their fields.

Last fall, the participants took their first step by completing an emotional and social competency inventory. They identified and talked with peers, senior faculty, and nurses and others they worked with in the hospital, office or OR asking them to provide the faculty member feedback through an on-line tool. The respondents then received an on-line link and completed the assessments. Brenda Dribin, of Dribin and Associates, met with each faculty member to review a personal report and discuss the findings.

Faculty members have participated in five learning sessions over the past five months focused on building reputation as a leader, using influence and finding common ground, solving leadership obstacles, teamwork and building resiliency.

The series provides this age cohort of faculty the first opportunity for them to receive feedback on how they are perceived and interact with others — a process that the department initiated in the mid-2000s to improve behavior and leadership skills, says G. Alexander Patterson, MD, the Joseph Bancroft Professor of Surgery and co-leader of the program. While other sessions had a broad approach to leadership development, he thought the teamwork session focusing on the operating room — which brought in BJH Vice President for Surgical Services Jackie Martin Jr., MD, anesthesiologist Michael Avidan, MBChB, transplant surgeon Maria B. Majella Doyle, MD, MBA, and top surgical nurses — gave young surgeons a unique opportunity to learn OR leadership from elite surgical team members.

Dr. Patterson has been impressed with how engaged participants are and believes they have learned key lessons. “Leadership results from an intentional process of development,” adds co-leader Tiffany Osborn, MD. “These participants are doing an amazing job building the foundations required to be effective leaders. By investing in our people, the department lays the groundwork of our future. If these participants are any indication, the future looks very bright indeed.”

What do participants think?

“There are times you have to step back and ask is there a better way to do this? How do you have these conversations when you have to give or receive feedback? The course has provided a great foundation for that.”

— Greg Murphy, MD, Urology

What is particularly valuable about this program is its ability to teach practical skills rather than to simply outline concepts. Regular application of these skills in day-to-day life is essential for leadership growth.

— Alison Snyder-Warwick, MD, Plastic & Reconstructive Surgery

“As surgeons, we are often confronted with things that are not foreseeable. ... the series provided us with mechanisms to identify the root cause of problems and how to manage situations better, particularly when there are high stakes.”

— Mohamed Zayed, MD, PhD, Vascular Surgery
An international presence: Residents, surgeons and staff fan out across the globe

The Washington University Department of Surgery has developed an international rotation to offer residents a glimpse of challenges in underdeveloped countries, and surgeons and staff have also reached out to help those without access to surgical care and to play a role in global medical educational efforts.

Malawi Rotation

Washington University general surgery residents can gain hands-on experience in global medicine through a rotation in Malawi, Africa.

As part of their residency experience, this international surgery rotation gives senior residents the option to spend 8 weeks at Mzuzu Central Hospital, a tertiary care center serving nearly 2.5 million citizens in North Malawi. There residents care for a wide range of adult and pediatric surgical patients and receive a unique educational experience in surgery and medicine. The rotation is coordinated with the University of Cincinnati General Surgery Residency, whose faculty provide guidance to residents. This past year, fourth-year Washington University general surgery residents David Brauer, MD, Matt Schill, MD, and Jennifer Yu, MD, treated patients at the center. This is the fourth year the Department of Surgery has participated in the rotation, and there will likely be two additional participants this year.

The work is similar in many respects to that of a resident at Barnes-Jewish Hospital: evaluating patients, assisting and operating under the supervision of attending surgeons, and playing a lead role in postoperative care. One of the key differences, however, is the lack of technology available such as CT, MRI or instant labs, providing an opportunity for residents to lean more heavily on their clinical skills. Residents may perform surgery for conditions more common in Malawi than in the United States such as sigmoid volvulus, intestinal schistosomiasis and disseminated tuberculosis. Burns, particularly in children and adults with epilepsy, are common due to the lack of modern cooking equipment in impoverished areas. Trauma was also common, including cases of lion bite. Nurses only have time to dispense medications and take vital signs, so patients are required to have a family member present to assist in their care. With these staff shortages, as well as bed space limitations, the residents also help teach Malawian clinical officers about efficiency of hospital process. “I tried to teach one thing that I learned at Barnes-Jewish Hospital to each of the interns and students – the need for a team checklist of tasks to be made on work rounds,” says Dr. Schill. “It sounds simple, but on a large team diffusion of responsibility can keep things from getting done efficiently. Later in my rotation, I saw the interns making a checklist and assigning tasks to people – that was very fulfilling to see.”

Surgical Outreach for the Americas

For Peggy Frisella, RN, mission trips for surgical outreach are part of the normal routine. Ms. Frisella, manager of research operations for the Section of Minimally Invasive Surgery, runs the Washington University Institute for Minimally Invasive Surgery and is administrator...
for the Institute for Surgical Education. Ms. Frisella is a co-founder of Surgical Outreach for the Americas (SOfA), which provides medical and surgical services in Central and South America, and does the logistic work that makes the missions possible. SOfA takes on average three trips a year and has traveled to Honduras, El Salvador and the Dominican Republic. SOfA is looking next toward a site in northern Belize in Corozal, on the Mexican border. SOfA’s first hernia repair trip was in 2009.

SOfA completed its 10th trip to the Dominican Republic in 2018 and will not return in the foreseeable future because it has performed so many hernia repairs that few patients are left. The focus of a trip in January 2019 was hernia repair of patients in Honduras. In late March, the team returned to El Salvador for the fourth time.

In all of these countries, a public hospital will give patients a list of supplies such as gauze, sutures and mesh, but oftentimes the effort stops there because they can’t afford the materials needed for their operations, Frisella explains. Many people in these developing countries become incapacitated and unable to work and support their families due to the need for a hernia operation. In many cases, they have been living in pain from their hernia conditions for years.

“We are trying to ease the burden of disease in these countries and to train the surgeons where possible to carry on our mission when we are gone,” says Ms. Frisella. She travels with nurses, surgeons, and most recently, a pediatric emergency room doctor, and her role is to make sure everything is running smoothly, trouble shoot and step in where needed. The team tries to provide educational opportunities in the form of lectures on medical topics. “There’s a whole arm of the trip that consists of instrument washing, wrapping and sterilization,” she says. On this recent trip, she was accompanied by BJC liver transplant coordinator Pam Thurston, who gave a lecture on pre- and postoperative care of hernias.

Douglas Brown co-leads Israel/Palestine trips for medical students

Since 2009, Surgery Clerkship Coordinator Douglas Brown, PhD, and Tennessee family physician David McRay, MD, have made a yearly trip to Palestine and Israel as part of a global health elective they worked to establish. They take with them five to six residents and/or fourth-year medical students who work with the Family Medicine Department at the Medical School for International Health at Ben Gurion University in Beer Sheva, Israel, as well as with various Palestinian hospitals and clinics in the West Bank – the occupied Palestinian Territories. Dr. McKay is with them for the entire month-long rotation, and Dr. Brown joins the group during the last 10 days as they learn about administering medicine in a region of conflict and poverty. The two made their first continuing medical education/continuing ethics education trip (without residents or medical students) to Gaza to assist Palestinian physicians three years ago and plan to return twice this year.

Abarbanells travel to impoverished areas, hope to return

Pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon Aaron Abarbanell, MD, and Ginnie Abarbanell, MD, a pediatric cardiologist, have been involved in traveling to administer care to impoverished areas of the world since 2011. The husband and wife team started their medical missions when Dr. Ginnie Abarbanell was in medical school, and they went to orphanages in the Baja Peninsula, Mexico. Among the locations of the mission trips in which they played key roles have been Eldoret, Bomet and Togo in Kenya, Africa, and Kosovo in Southeastern Europe.

One of the trips’ goals was to allow first- and second-year medical students to participate in medical missions. Dr. Aaron Abarbanell considered being a career medical missionary and found the trips useful in deciding on pediatric heart surgery as his specialty to pursue. The physicians have worked with programs sponsored by Indiana University and organizations like U.S. Agency for International Development and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

The couple has found places in the developing world where their cardiac care skills can be partnered for the most benefit.

Congenital heart disease affects 1 in 110 kids, whether born in the U.S. or West

Story continued on next page.
International presence, from previous page

Africa, but in developing countries, 2.4 million children ages 5 to 14 are affected.

Dr. Ginnie Abarbanell said that ultimately, the mission is about adapting to what the need is; you may have to adjust to the specific needs of the location. “It’s been eye opening to look back on these experiences and see how it applies to my work here. In other words, is my work here at WashU separate from that?” asks Dr. Aaron Abarbanell. “I think these trips can go back to understanding diversity of culture not only going abroad but understanding diversity of culture right here,” adds Dr. Ginnie Abarbanell. “You see the babies in the Togo hospital wear a dress so their parents can just lift the clothing and clean them off because they can’t afford diapers.”

The couple hopes to continue future mission trips overseas at some point.

Jean Hunleth, PhD, MPH, wins Skinner Book Award: Dr. Hunleth, a public health sciences instructor, received the 2018 Elliot P. Skinner Book Award from the Association of Africanist Anthropology for her book Children as Caregivers: The Global Fight against Tuberculosis and HIV in Zambia. The book uses an ethnographic approach to study the active caregiving role Zambian children play when their guardians become seriously ill.

Promotions

Ryan Fields, MD, has been named professor of surgery and chief of the Section of Surgical Oncology. A member of the faculty since 2011, Dr. Fields received a medical degree at Duke University School of Medicine in Durham, N.C., and completed a general surgery residency and research fellowship at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine. He completed a surgical oncology fellowship at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York before returning here as an assistant professor of surgery.

Dr. Fields specializes in surgical treatment of cancer including tumors of the upper gastrointestinal tract, pancreatic cancer, liver and metastatic liver cancer, stomach cancer, sarcoma and melanoma. His National Institutes of Health-funded research is focused on the biology of cancer metastases and small animal and ex vivo modeling of cancer. A recent area of study is “Tumor-on-a-Chip” technology, which places a tumor in a micro-engineered system outside the body of a patient, allowing for the accelerated study of tumor biology, treatment resistance and susceptibility without the time needed to grow the tumor in an animal model.

Dr. Fields is director of resident research for the Washington University General Surgery Residency and co-leads the Siteman Melanoma and Cutaneous Oncology Program and Solid Tumor Therapeutics Program.

Siobhan Sutcliffe, PhD, ScM, MHS, has been promoted to professor of surgery in the Division of Public Health Sciences. She received a master of science degree in infectious disease epidemiology at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, a master of health science degree in biostatistics and a doctoral degree in infectious disease epidemiology at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Baltimore, Md. She completed post-doctoral work at Johns Hopkins in cancer epidemiology.

Dr. Sutcliffe’s independent research focuses on the epidemiology/etiology of urologic conditions. Her National Institutes of Health-funded research includes studies of prostate cancer, benign prostatic hyperplasia, interstitial cystitis/bladder pain syndrome, chronic prostatitis/chronic pelvic pain syndrome, and other lower urinary tract symptoms in men and women. She also teaches in the Master of Population Health Sciences Program.

Gerald Fortuna Jr., MD, Col, USAF, SFS, MC, was promoted to adjunct associate professor of surgery. Dr. Fortuna is a member of both the Acute and Critical Care Surgery and Vascular Surgery sections. He is also director of the United States Air Force St. Louis C-STARS (Center for Sustainment of Trauma and Readiness Skills) Program. He received a medical degree at the University of South Carolina School of Medicine, Columbia, S.C., and a master of business administration degree at The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. His general surgery residency training was at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. He completed a trauma/critical care fellowship at the University of Cincinnati and a vascular/endovascular surgery fellowship at the University of Texas, Houston.

As director of the C-STARS Program, he oversees training of military medical technicians, nurses and doctors through 19 two-week sessions conducted annually. The program is in partnership with Washington University/Barnes-Jewish Hospital, SSM Saint Louis University (SLU) Hospital and Mercy St. Louis, where classes and clinical rotations are held for Air Force rotators from around the world. St. Louis is one of four national training sites. In addition to trauma and vascular conditions, Dr. Fortuna specializes in REBOA (Resuscitative Endovascular Balloon Occlusion of the Aorta), a relatively new blood-control technique developed by the military and only available at a handful of medical institutions.
Piroska Kopar seeks to integrate ethics training into conferences, launch new center

The Department of Surgery’s long tradition of ethics training is moving forward in new directions under Piroska Kopar, MD, a trauma surgeon who joined the faculty after completing two ethics fellowships at Harvard Medical School and one in surgery education research at the Association for Surgical Education (ASE).

Dr. Kopar is building on a foundation established in the most recent era by emeritus colorectal surgeon Ira Kodner, MD, and Vice Chair for Education Mary Klingensmith, MD, the Mary Culver Distinguished Professor of Surgery. Dr. Kodner and Dr. Klingensmith, formerly general surgery residency program director, co-led the national Kamangar Surgery Residency Program in Medical Ethics, launched by the American College of Surgeons, and created “Pizza Rounds” with Washington University general surgery residents, in which they discussed ethical dilemmas over pizza. The department emerged as a national leader in ethics as it became a major focus in medicine.

Dr. Kopar’s Harvard academic fellowship included doctors, physical therapists, nurses and other health care professionals. As the only surgeon, one of her interests was to see how surgical ethics fit into the larger context of medical ethics. She received a broad education from the ethics fellowships, including understanding cultural differences in ethical frameworks and what makes the American approach unique. The ASE fellowship emphasized skills in planning, implementing and reporting research studies in surgical education.

For the department’s general surgery residency, Dr. Kopar is developing a curriculum with 15 major themes in ethics to be included in the program’s didactics and Morbidity and Mortality (M&M) conferences to be cycled every two years, as well as adding ethics questions to the mock oral sessions residents take to prepare for their oral board exams. Her approach to teaching residents in clinical ethics is to incorporate it into existing structures, thus making it an integral part of everyday surgical training.

“The minute you separate out ethics, it becomes marginalized and an afterthought,” says Dr. Kopar.

Dr. Kopar is also in the formative stages of creating a national model that aims to set a national standard for ethics education in surgical residencies. The Center for Humanism and Ethics in Surgical Specialties (CHESS) will serve both internal and national communities with a website that offers resources in education and training, research and organizational policy.

Urologic nurse practitioner fellowship program prepares NPs to hit ground running

Nurse practitioners (NPs) play a critical role in the Division of Urology and in the urology field generally, educating patients and providing care that allows urologists to spend needed time in the operating room. For the last four years, the division – under the direction of Vicky Peck, RN, BSN, MHS, CURN, and Chief Gerald Andriole, MD – has also trained NPs to hit the ground running when they begin their urology or other practice.

The fellowship – now in its fifth year – is funded by Midwest Stone Institute. Ms. Peck estimates it is one of about 5 NP urology fellowships in the country. National Public Radio’s Health News Service reported there are now about 50 NP fellowships nationwide in all specialties; the first one was started in 2007.

Current fellow Stephanie Clawson, APRN, AGPCNP-BC, who formerly worked as a nurse in the Pediatric Urology Division Chief Gerald Andriole, MD, reviews a poster used to explain prostate cancer to patients with nurse practitioner fellow Stephanie Clawson, APRN, AGPCNP-BC.
around the department

Intensive Care Unit at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital and in Student Health Services at Washington University, says the training has been valuable.

“This is much more in-depth training,” says Ms. Clawson. “When you go into clinical care, you are at the mercy of the people precepting or orienting you. You are just thrown into the situation. In the fellowship, you get a very structured organized orientation to all different areas of the specialty. It’s been a great experience.”

In addition to learning all clinical aspects, the fellow learns patient care documentation, billing rules and other practices that would be applicable to any clinical practice.

The first four graduating fellows were all placed at outside urologic practices. Ms. Clawson is undecided about the specialty she would like to join.

“The program started as a collaboration with Dr. Andriole,” Ms. Peck says. “The field of urology heavily uses NPs, and we thought we could be at a forefront of improving training.”

One of the key roles of NPs is patient education, which physicians often struggle to fully address. Medical studies have shown the addition of NPs can improve patient care and yield positive results in other areas of healthcare.

Trends point to continued growth in the NP field. The Association of American Medical Colleges predicts that the United States will face a shortage of between 42,600 and 121,300 physicians by 2030.
BSO VALENTINE’S DAY
Financial Data Analyst Nasian Marko (far left) led a Business Services Organization (BSO) group giving carnations to women in the BSO office on Valentine’s Day. Pictured during the event with Mr. Marko are (l-r) recipient Christine Gatuiria, senior grant specialist; Mario Gjika, analyst data reporter; Scott Warren, manager of credentialing; and recipients Dianna Batsch, senior grant specialist; Star Drennen, senior grant specialist; and Connie Pliemling, senior grant specialist.

Jason Wellen, MD, surgical director of Kidney Transplant and Kidney/Pancreas Transplant at Barnes-Jewish Hospital and Washington University, is principal investigator of the Live Donor Champion Program at Washington University. The clinical trial is part of a three-year grant funded by the National Institutes of Health. It is in partnership with Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, where the pilot program has shown an increase in the number of living donors, and with the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

With 90,000 people in the United States waiting for a kidney transplant, there is a strong interest in increasing the number of living donors. The Live Donor Champion program at the Washington University Transplant Center hopes to increase its living kidney donor rate from 20 percent to 40 percent within the next two years. Living donor transplants can be done within a month or two of medical clearance and have better surgical outcomes than transplants using cadaver kidneys.

There are barriers to identifying a living donor, however. Among them are lack of education, reluctance to discuss one’s illness, and a hesitancy to ask people about donating.

What makes this trial unique from other living donor programs is the use of a designated representative, called a “champion,” to address these barriers. A champion is someone whom an intended recipient identifies to be their advocate who spreads the news about their need for a kidney. “This takes the onus off of them,” explains Dr. Wellen, “since some people are not comfortable discussing their need for organ donation.”

The Live Donor Champion Program uses Facebook app to tell story, identify donors

Facebook donor app
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The program educates intended organ recipients and champions so they can be successful in the living donor search. They attend one lecture a month for six months.

“We educate them on the importance of being transplanted, the life of a donor, and other key points,” says Dr. Wellen.

The lectures also teach how to use social media to help find a donor. Facebook has designed an app for the trial, which uses patient responses to a few basic questions to create a biographical story that the intended organ recipient can approve and post.