VCU/VCUHS Leadership in Graduate Medical Education Award

Brian J. Kaplan, M.D.

In six short years, Brian J. Kaplan, M.D. has transformed the surgical training program. “He has proven that through hard work and dedication to patient care, people and principles, it is possible to create a really topnotch, first tier Surgical Training Program in Richmond,” wrote Dr. Marc P. Posner, Professor and Chairman, Division of Transplantation. This makes his selection as the Program Director winner of this year’s leadership in Graduate Medical Education Award a very natural choice.

Dr. Kaplan began his tenure as Program Director at a challenging time – the inception of the 80 hour work week. Undaunted, he took a proactive approach and developed a rotation schedule that would optimize education, the ability to perform cases, patient care, and still allow adherence to the 80 hours,” explained James Neifeld, MD, Stuart McGuire Professor and Chair, Department of Surgery. His positive attitude in the face of such a significant change was clearly a good omen for the Department.

In the years since, the marks of his leadership are seen and felt throughout the Department. The surgical training program he developed “is dedicated to producing competent, compassionate, safe and highly skilled surgeons, and has provided many benchmarks for national quality initiatives in surgical training,” added Dr. Posner.

His commitment to finding innovative ways to enhance surgical education has taken many forms, including using the format of The Price is Right to teach systems based practice. He also has been instrumental in driving the simulation program within the Department of Surgery and was a key force in the development of the simulation center for the institution. He introduced a “Surgical Scholars” program, and he devised an impressively complex tool to help prepare residents for oral examinations when applying for board certification. Thanks to the preparation provided, the program now enjoys the highest pass rate for first time exam takers in the state of Virginia. His efforts have earned him recognition from the Association for Program Directors in Surgery for his leadership and innovation, among other honors.

“Due process, documented evaluation and effective resident advising have been hallmarks of his time as program director,” praised Ronald Merrell, MD, Professor of Surgery. In addition, his work ethic is legendary, both on behalf of the Program and for the benefit of his patients and residents. “He has devoted untold hours to the challenges of curriculum, hour regulation and conflict resolution through process,” added Dr. Neifeld. Another colleague marveled: “Dr. Kaplan has performed these duties and more 24/7/365 without protected time, with little recognition and without additional compensation.”

Despite the enormous time commitment involved as Program Director, Dr. Kaplan maintains a large clinical practice and is recognized as one of the top doctors in Richmond. “His strength starts with his kindness, skill and dedication shown in the care of his own surgical oncology patients,” a colleague explained. “He refuses to compromise both the volume of patients and his dedication because he feels it is essential for his role as faculty member and program director.”

While Dr. Kaplan is highly regarded as “a man of incredible high energy and utmost ethics and integrity,” and as an individual who “exceeds all of the qualifications expected of the consummate Program Director, it is a deeper dedication that makes him most deserving of this award.” A former administrative chief resident in general surgery, Brian King, MD, says it best: “Dr. Kaplan develops skilled surgeons who understand science and technique, but what truly sets him apart from others is that he develops human beings.”

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Faculty Excellence Awards