VCU/VCUHS Leadership in Graduate Medical Education Award

Laurel J. Lyckholm, M.D.

There’s nothing easy when it comes to treating patients and training fellows in Hematology and Oncology, and it can be argued that the some of the challenges are even greater in Palliative Care. Yet Laurel Lyckholm, MD carries off the responsibilities as dual program director in both those departments with remarkable skill, grace and compassion, earning the gratitude of colleagues, fellows, patients and families alike. Which makes her selection as the Fellowship Director winner of this year’s Leadership in Graduate Medical Education Award a natural.

“She has tremendous amount of empathy and caring that she conveys in her care for the patient and the care of her students. Her enthusiasm for her work is contagious,” explained Elke Friedman, MD, Virginia Cancer Institute. Yet along with this depth of caring, she also knows when to get tough. “Dr. Lyckholm is the ideal professional parent for our fellows,” said Mary Helen Hackney, MD, of the Massey Cancer Center. “She loves and respects them. She has high expectations. She sets limits. She disciplines when necessary. Most importantly, she leads by example.”

“She treats the fellows with respect while educating and advising them and she has created an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, learning, motivation and thoroughness,” added Assistant Professor Robin K Matsuyama, PhD. “The unfailing results are highly accomplished skilled clinicians who are compassionate and dedicated to their patients - clinicians that any patient would be fortunate to have and are a direct tribute to Dr Lyckholm’s skills in teaching and program leadership.”

Balance is a key factor in Dr. Lyckholm’s approach as Program Director. “Laurie has recognized new facets of the fellowship program to increase the educational experience and has focused the attention of the fellowship and fellows toward a balance of education, research, teaching and service,” explained Harold M. Chung, MD. “Dr. Lyckholm was readily available to me both as an oncology fellow and colleague,” wrote Rosemarie Mannino, MD. “She taught me how to go through the process of submitting and revising manuscripts. This learning process is not formally taught and requires patience and one-on-one guidance from a mentor.”

It is her ability to make time for mentoring that her Fellows find most outstanding about Dr. Lyckholm’s leadership. “As a mentor, she has demonstrated all of the qualities I admire in practice,” wrote a former mentee. “These include the ability to truly listen to patients, the strength to support them and their families, the honesty in their care, and the respect she demonstrates on a daily basis.”

A past recipient of the Humanism in Medicine award, Dr. Lyckholm “is also a profound supporter of the humanism of each patient, and reminds us to incorporate the whole person rather than solely the diagnosis,” wrote one Hematology/Oncology Fellow. A former Fellow in Palliative Care amplified the sentiment, applying it to Dr. Lyckholm’s treatment of her Fellows as well: “This is a difficult fellowship – intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, and Laurie goes out of her way to make sure fellows are taking care of themselves and finding a balance that works.”

While the success of her leadership may be weighed in factors such as her Fellows’ outstanding board pass rates, the success of Dr. Lyckholm as an educator and a mentor is evident in the emotion and the love her Fellows use to describe her. Pages could be filled with their heartfelt admiration, but perhaps this brief sentence will suffice: “Dr. Lyckholm is without question, one of the most loving, caring, thoughtful, selfless and considerate people I have ever had the pleasure of working with.”