Innovative. Dedicated. Inspiring. Effective. These are the words colleagues and students use to describe Dr. Diane Biskobing, Director of the Endocrinology and Metabolism Fellowship Program since 2003. Beneath her quiet and calm exterior, Dr. Biskobing is always actively and enthusiastically planning and implementing ways to improve the educational experience for her fellows, with remarkable results.

One key innovation that Dr. Biskobing has developed is a highly regarded core competency-based curriculum combining didactic learning and clinical experience. The endocrinology case conference “is one of the experiences that they value most in their training,” says Dr. Stephanie Call, Core Program Director for Internal Medicine. “They describe the learning climate of this weekly conference as one in which they are challenged, yet supported to push their knowledge and skills to the next level by engaging in dialogue, discussion and debate with each other and with their faculty members.”

In partnership with colleagues at the Hunter Holmes McGuire Veteran’s Affairs Medical Center (VAMC), Dr. Biskobing developed a Women’s Health endocrine track. Fellows rotate through clinics that focus on endocrine problems particularly relevant to women including osteoporosis, polycystic ovary syndrome, and thyroid disorders.

Helping fellows learn to better support patients with chronic conditions like diabetes goes beyond them learning how to address physical symptoms. In the “Living with Diabetes” module Dr. Biskobing developed along with colleagues Linda Thurby-Hay, R.N., and Dr. John Clore, fellows wear insulin pumps and learn to monitor their diet, blood glucose levels, and deliver insulin. “This program really helped me better understand what patients go through every day and made me a better physician in understanding, counseling, and educating patients with diabetes,” states Dr. Kelsey E. S. Salley, a former fellow now practicing in the community.

Reflecting her commitment to excellence in clinical teaching, Dr. Biskobing has organized a 14 hour faculty-fellow integrated Stanford Clinical Teaching Skills seminar with Dr. Stephanie Call to improve teaching skills in the endocrine division. This program “brought together faculty and fellows in a small group setting…and gave me the tools to proceed forward as a clinician educator and to feel confident in my new role,” says Elizabeth Reilly, MD, a current Endocrinology Fellow.

This year, Dr. Biskobing is implementing training in motivational interviewing, a technique designed to enhance doctor-patient communication and positive behavior change in patients, especially those with difficult chronic diseases such as diabetes mellitus. All of these initiatives have created a rich, engaging and effective training program. “Testimony to her success as leader of this program is the fact that the pass rate for the endocrinology certifying exam has been 100% for our fellows since she took over the program director position,” states Dr. David Gardner, Professor of Medicine.

With such results, Dr. Biskobing could continue her fellowship in much the same way each year, but as her colleague, Dr. Edmond P. Wickham, comments, “Her constant receptiveness to input from fellows regarding their concerns and their ideas on how to improve the training program supports her assertion that feedback ‘goes both ways.’”

In addition to her fellowship director duties, Dr. Biskobing has a long record of service to the School at the highest levels and her talents have been recognized on a national level as well. She has served on the USMLE Step 1 Physiology Item Writing Committee and since 2004 has been active on the Competency Committee of the Association of Program Directors in Endocrinology and Metabolism.

“When I think of leadership, I immediately think of Dr. Biskobing,” says Dr. Douglas A. Johnson, a former fellow now in community practice. “After my two years in her training program, I can say without a doubt that Dr. Biskobing is the standard to which all program directors at VCU should strive when it comes to excellence in leadership in graduate medical education.”