

# *VCU School of Medicine*

## *WISDM Professional Achievement Award*

### **Joann N. Bodurtha, M.D., M.P.H.**



"She is often seen in the halls between her Sanger Office and the Dalton Clinic, the small but mighty dynamo with the oversized backpack, consulting with physicians and students... (sharing her) personal brand of wisdom, humor, and pragmatism." To those who have been fortunate enough to train and work with this year's honoree, this description conjures up a familiar set of seemingly contradictory images. Calm and passionate. Challenging and supportive. Straightforward and unfailingly kind.

All of these qualities exist seamlessly in Dr. Joann Bodurtha, MD, MPH, Professor of Human and Molecular Genetics, Pediatrics, Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Epidemiology and Community Health, this year's recipient of the WISDM Professional Achievement Award.

As a teacher and mentor, Dr. Bodurtha is known for her encyclopedic knowledge of human genetics as well as for challenging students to develop their own core values and sense of commitment to patients and their families. Jessica Waxler, MS, CGC, a former student now at Harvard's MassGeneral Hospital for Children, says, "Dr. Bodurtha had a profound impact on my professional training. She never missed a teaching opportunity whether in the classroom or in the hospital." Another former student, Rebecca Yee, MS, CGC, now at NYU Cancer Institute, declares, "I strive to provide the same compassion and dedication as Dr. Bodurtha demonstrates to her patients, profession, and students."

Dr. Bodurtha is a tireless advocate for her patients and their families. "She has an amazing ability to connect with patients. I am constantly trying to remember key phrases she uses to counsel patients and key cues she picks up from patients to aid not just in medical diagnosis, but in patient communication" says John Quillin PhD, MPH, Assistant Professor, Human and Molecular Genetics, a former student who is now a colleague.

Her abilities as a teacher and clinician have been key to her leadership success as the Director of the Va- LEND (Virginia Leadership in Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities) program since its inception in 1995. Va-LEND has trained 136 students in 18 different disciplines in leadership skills to better enable them to advocate for children with special health care needs and their families. Fred P. Orellove, Ph.D., Professor and Executive Director, VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities, states that Dr. Bodurtha "has built the program into one of the preeminent LEND programs in the country. Ideas she introduced... have been incorporated into the federal guidance for all programs." Susan E. Foster, MSPT, Director of Physical Rehabilitation, Elwyn and a graduate of the first LEND class, shares, "My work as a team member and a leader continues to be strongly influenced by the example of Dr. Joann Bodurtha and her work."

Va-LEND is only one of the areas in which Dr. Bodurtha has demonstrated her leadership skills. Deborah J. Bowen of the Boston University School of Public Health, echoes many others when she states that Dr. Bodurtha "steps up to the plate, in terms of taking on the biggest burden for her team, her department, and her field." With VCU SOM Dean Strauss as PI, she and Dr. Sarah Spiegel Co-Direct the Building Interdisciplinary Research Careers in Women's Health (BIRCWH) Program of the VCU Institute for Women's Health, an NIH funded-program to mentor and promote career development of researchers studying women's health issues. As a successful researcher responsible for \$15 million in funding over the past 15 years, and an

author on over 100 peer-reviewed publications, Dr. Bodurtha is a valuable mentor for those beginning and growing their academic careers.

Dr. Bodurtha was President of WISDM, then called Women in Medicine (WIM), from 2000-2003. During her tenure membership was expanded to include women scientists and the name changed to Women in Medicine and Science. Wendy Klein, MD, Associate Professor Emeritus of Internal Medicine & OBGYN and Sr. Deputy Director Emeritus, VCU Institute for Women's Health, states, "She has been at the helm of the ongoing effort to foster the professional development of women faculty, and to address the many systemic challenges facing women in academic medicine."

Among the honors Dr. Bodurtha has received are the 2009 Outstanding Achievement Award from the Association of University Centers on Disabilities for excellence in teaching, scholarship, and serving the community at-large; the 2008 Genetic Alliance Art of Listening Award; the 2006 VA Breast Cancer Foundation Sherry Kohlenberg Health Service Award; the 2006 State Council of Higher Education for VA Dominion Outstanding Faculty Award; the Dean's Recognition for Outstanding Leadership and Service in 2003; and the first SOM Innovation in Teaching Award in 1999.

Her role-modeling extends to how she balances work and family. James Levenson, MD, Vice-Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Professor of Psychiatry, Medicine and Surgery states, "She is an exemplary role model for women (and men) faculty regarding how to manage a two career marriage, with both working in academic medicine, as well as being parents." Former student Heather Creswick, MS, CGC, of VCU Massey Cancer Center shares that, unsurprisingly, "Every day after school Joann asked her daughter: what did you learn and who did you help?" She shares with her family a dedication to justice in health care and all areas of life.

A friend and colleague since 1987, Judith L. Benkendorf, MS, CGC, Special Assistant to the Executive Director, American College of Medical Genetics, shares a list of what she sees as Dr. Bodurtha's underlying core values:

Always be fair  
Work hard  
Fight for the underdog  
Protect the health of America's children as a national resource  
Teach to inspire  
Make genetics understandable, accessible, and not scary  
When old solutions do not work, be innovative  
Ask tough questions and don't be afraid to answer them  
Leave audiences with take home messages that are relevant  
Volunteer when there is an unfilled need  
Mentoring and role modeling are important callings  
Share all teachable moments with trainees  
The resources you need may be under the next stone; don't be afraid to turn it over

In the words of a colleague: "Joann has demonstrated to all how to be a renaissance woman: a wife, a mother, a superb physician and a citizen of the world." By never expecting less of herself than others, and for backing her values and wisdom up with effective action, Dr. Bodurtha daily exemplifies the qualities and accomplishments celebrated by the WISDM Professional Achievement Award.