

Still Going Strong – The History of VA Academic Affiliations

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D., President, Association of American Medical Colleges

- Right after WWII we faced a situation in this country with nearly 13 million men and women returning, many of them with injuries or illnesses that would require health care. At the same time we had many doctors returning who hadn't received their specialty training.

Narrator - The VA's administrator General Omar Bradley had a problem on his hands. The VA had a severe shortage of full time doctors, less than a 1000, and had a reputation for sub-standard medicine. General Bradley took the council of a team of medical experts to help resolve this dilemma, including a respected orthopedic surgeon from Chicago, Dr. Paul B. Magnuson and the soon to be world renowned surgeon Dr. Michael E. DeBakey. A novel idea was proposed. Join each VA Hospital with a medical school. Make the VA hospital a teaching hospital with a medical school faculty in charge of medical care, and form a Deans Committee to overall see it all. It was a bold move that would forever change the face of the nation's health care.

Sandy Garfunkel, Director, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - It began early, and I think and that indicates early recognition of the importance of affiliations having a successful quality care environment.

Narrator – Today these affiliations are as strong as ever. The statistics are impressive. Almost 28 thousand medical residents and 16 thousand medical students, receive some of their training at VA facilities every year, making the VA the nation's largest provider of medical education.

Jim Scott, M.D., Dean, The George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences - There is something to be said for having a consistent partner you know you can count on, where the focus is on quality care for an incredibly valued patient population, our veterans, simultaneously, with real quality education.

Narrator – 107 of the nations 125 medical schools have formally allied themselves with the VA.

Ross D. Fletcher, MD, Chief of Staff, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - Their interns, their residents, their students are extremely valuable in our setting.

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D. - For the veterans and the hospitals caring for them, they have access to a wonderful pool of talent.

Craig Carpenter – Veteran - The most surprising thing to me was how many university doctors come here and train. Now I know, not only is my doctor good, he's so good that he's actually a trainer.

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D. - For the medical schools, it provides them a much needed teaching venue.

Adhuna Chhabra, Senior Resident, Georgetown University Medical Center - It's extremely academic with the attendings, the way we do rounds, very similar to our academic hospitals.

Katherine Chretien, M.D., Director of Clerkship, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - Something I tell all the students on the first day is this is a great place to learn.

Divya Shroff, M.D., Attending Physician, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - It allowed me to learn how to be a better doctor because there was so much that I could do, and I think that's actually one thing our students appreciate, they actually get to do more here.

(talking to patient) - How we doing? Where did you go today?

Being that their all veterans, they come from a different place, have a different story, and I think both sides benefit.

Alan Greenberg, M.D., MPH, Professor and Chair, Dept. of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, The George Washington University – I find it personally very gratifying and that I get to provide health care directly to our nation's veterans.

Stephen Deutsch, M.D., PhD, Associate Chief of Staff for Mental Health, Washington, DC VA Medical Center -The patient is rounded on and attended to by professors of medicine and I think that is something very unique.

Ross D. Fletcher, M.D. - We're able to provide very advanced therapies that would not be available otherwise.

Sandy Garfunkel - When you talk to residents here, they love training here. The major reason they love training here is our electronic medical record.

Divya Shroff, M.D. - It's been so nice having everything available to you, all the time, so we spend so much more time on rounds actually talking about the patients or the results.

Steven Singh, MD, Chief of Cardiology, Acting Associate Chief of Staff for R&D, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - The understating also calls for part

time physicians where they may be 5/8 at the VA or 3/8 at the university so there's this close relationship, not only at the training program level but the attending staff level.

Stephen Deutsch, M.D. - The VA is so important because we are our nation's biomedical laboratory.

Anton Sidawy, M.D., Chief of Surgery, Washington, DC VA Medical Center - We attract a lot of excellent faculty because they're interested in research and this is part of the attraction, teaching and research, which if we don't have them, otherwise, we would not get such a high kind of a faculty.

Darrell G. Kirch, M.D. - The communication that we have with the VA is key to the partnership. One of the devices we've used is a Deans Liaison Committee.

Jim Scott, M.D. - We really use this as a place for new ideas to come forward and as a place for issues to be resolved.

Stephen Deutsch, M.D. - It's a forum for the leadership of the affiliated medical schools to meet and interact with the director of the medical center, the Chief of Staff and key clinical leaders.

Jim Scott, M.D. - I doubt there is a Dean in the country who can't trace part of their own training to time they spent at a VA Hospital. I've often said, I learned to be the physician later but I learned to be a doctor at the VA Hospital.

Ross D. Fletcher, M.D. - In talking with the universities, they see us as the longest lasting and the most potent of their relationships.

Stephen Deutsch, M.D. - Most important thing about the academic affiliation is that it's the greatest guarantor that our American veterans will receive the most outstanding medical care possible.

Sandy Garfunkel - Sometimes people say, who do you think gets the best of the deal, and I have to tell you honestly I think the quality of care that we get as a result of affiliations means the VA gets the best of the deal.

Narrator – What started as a simple idea in a time of great need has stood the test of time. Still strong at 60 years, these academic affiliations are a testament of our nation's commitment to excellent medical care for our veteran's, and the best medical education system in the world.