Chairs’ Corner: Transition of Dennis Dimitri, MD as Vice Chair

I’m writing to announce that Dr. Dennis Dimitri has decided to step down from his position as our Vice Chair for Clinical Services after December 31. He plans to reduce his work to half-time, focusing on his clinical practice while continuing his advocacy work. I expect that he will continue to serve the Department and the UMass Memorial system in a more limited capacity as well.

Dennis has had a remarkable career as a family physician and as a physician leader. Raised in Worcester and educated at Clark University, he survived the specialty-oriented atmosphere at George Washington University School of Medicine and came home to train as a Family Physician at the Hahnemann Family Health Center. Upon graduation in 1982, he established his private practice across the street from the hospital. As his practice grew, it attracted a broad range of patients ranging from the local community to leaders from the business and medical communities. He handpicked his practice associates, and they have continued to serve their patients and their families for decades.

His first major leadership role came in 1986, when he was asked to serve as the founding Chief of Family Practice at Hahnemann Hospital. In those days, the job required being a spokesperson for the new specialty as he led his department through the administrative and politically charged world of hospital politics. He established our first process for granting hospital privileges (including obstetrics), and was quickly recognized by all for his professionalism and integrity, honesty and fairness.

A quick series of mergers brought Hahnemann, Holden and Memorial Hospitals together in 1989. When I joined as Chair, I was thrilled that Dennis agreed to serve as Associate Chair. At a hospital with little past experience with Family Physicians in leadership roles, he served as the President of the Memorial PHO and as the regional Medical Director for Blue Cross. In 1998, when Memorial and UMass merged, he agreed to continue as our department’s Vice Chair. He was appointed to the inaugural Board of Trustees for the new UMass Memorial Health Care, serving from 1998-2006.

Venturing into the world of advocacy, Dennis was elected President of the Massachusetts Academy of Family Physicians from 2008-2010, and he was the first Family Physician to be elected President of the Massachusetts Medical Society (MMS) in modern time, a position he held from 2015-16. He has served on multiple task forces and committees for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as well as organized medicine with emphasis on issues of
advocacy, health care reform and management, and workforce development. He currently chairs the MMS Opioid Task Force. As a faculty member, he has served as a role model and mentor for countless students and residents. In 2015, the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine honored him with their Advocate of the Year award.

Though my feelings about Dennis stepping away from his role are decidedly mixed, there is serendipity in his decision. With the appointment of a new Chair in the coming year, opportunities for others to step into the leadership roles Dennis has filled are certain to arise. Though change is always a somewhat anxious proposition, it will lead to new thoughts, new plans, and new leaders to rise and have their chance to shine. We have several talented leaders across the department; as the timetable for the recruitment of a new Chair becomes evident, we will implement whatever plans are necessary to meet the department’s short term clinical leadership needs.

Dennis has assured me that he does not intend to disappear from the scene. He will continue as an active member of our faculty and he will continue in his various leadership roles at the MassAFP and AAFP, the Mass Medical Society, and the AMA. He looks forward to an opportunity to mentor and support others with interest in assuming more active roles both in leadership in the department, and in bringing their skills, experience, and viewpoints forward in the societies of organized medicine.

Please join me in congratulating Dennis for his terrific service and dedication, and in wishing him well in this transition phase of his career. Later this Fall, we will sponsor an event to provide an opportunity for all to do this in person.

Dan Lasser