

# Recognizing Clinical Excellence

ACADEMY STRIVES TO PROMOTE PHYSICIANS BEST WORK

The Johns Hopkins Medicine logo—an equilateral triangle representing the three-part mission of research, teaching and patient care—epitomizes the trail this institution blazed from the day its doors opened. Uniting what had once been disparate endeavors, Johns Hopkins defined modern academic medicine: clinical care informed by scientific discovery, and medical education grounded in both.

For physicians pursuing a career in the demanding arena of clinical and academic medicine, success is often gauged not by the doctoral degree that follows their name, but by the professorial title that precedes it. And it's the impact of the doctor's work—the sine qua non for scaling the academic ladder from assistant, to associate, and finally to full professor—that's long been most easily measured by the quality and quantity of scientific publications. Those seeking to advance on the strength of their clinical acumen have found it much harder to muster comparable objective evidence of achievement.

That may be about to change thanks to a project launched at Johns Hopkins' Center for Innovative Medicine. Called the Miller-Coulson Academy of Clinical Excellence, the undertaking was sparked several years ago when Anne Miller, a former patient of one of Hopkins' world-renowned clinicians, asked David Hellmann one thought-provoking question: "Why aren't there more Philip Tumultys?"

In effect, says the Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center vice dean, Miller put a match to a bonfire. "For



David Hellmann and Scott Wright hope the Miller-Coulson Academy of Clinical Excellence will serve to recognize physicians for outstanding clinical practice.

quite some time," Hellmann explains, "it seemed to us that some academic medical centers have lost their footing. Instead of patients being first, they came in somewhere after grants, national rankings and prestigious discoveries. But Dr. Tumulty [who died in 1989 after serving on Hopkins' medical faculty for nearly 50 years] taught that the ultimate measure of success is the patient's well-being. Our only real goal should be improving the lives of patients, and teaching doctors and scientists to do the same."

So, with a gift from Anne

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Miller's daughter, Sarah Miller Coulson and her husband, Frank Coulson, the Miller-Coulson Academy—the first of its kind in the country—set out to find ways to recognize and promote outstanding clinical practice.

The academy grew from two years of legwork by four initial Miller-Coulson scholars: Scott Wright, Colleen Christmas, Steve Kravet and Chris Durso. To define clinical excellence in an academic setting and find systematic means of measuring it, these well-respected Hopkins clinicians reviewed the medical literature, conducted their own research, and sought the perspectives of institutional and national leaders in the country's top departments of medicine. Based on their findings, the scholars then developed the "clinical portfolio," a tool to measure the academic clinician's performance and

contributions, which is collated by faculty members who are nominated and apply for membership in the academy.

"We acknowledge that only if we base the academy's benchmarks on empirical research will they be accepted," says Wright, the academy director and a professor in the Department of Medicine. Among the metrics they're investigating are how far a patient is willing to travel for a doctor's service, being invited by other institutions to conduct grand rounds, and authorship in clinical publications and conference presentations.

Now, in addition to an external review board made up of nationally recognized professors from Harvard, Yale, UCLA, McGill, the University of Chicago and the University of Washington, the academy has elected its first six members, who will serve as mentors for clinical excellence and participate in activities to promote excellence in patient care.

The long-term goal, says Wright, is that being a Miller-Coulson Academy member will carry real clout. "We're modeled," he says, "after UCSF's teaching academy," set up 10 years ago to promote and recognize excellence in medical education. "They have data showing that people chosen as members were promoted faster than those who didn't get in. We hope universities begin to recognize that membership in our academy is a sign of true clinical excellence and that those clinicians deserved to be recognized." ■