Ronald R. Peterson knows how many inpatients were treated on an average day in 1982 at Baltimore City Hospitals, which became Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center (about 400).

He can tell you the budgeted operating expenses for The Johns Hopkins Hospital in fiscal year 2013 (about $1.8 billion).

Ask him almost anything about Johns Hopkins’ administration and operations during the last 40 years, and he’ll produce the answer.

Mastery of such detail is one of Peterson’s astonishing abilities. So is his skill at working amicably with colleagues in every division within the vast Johns Hopkins Medicine enterprise, and so too is his sensitivity to patient needs and Johns Hopkins’ role in the communities it serves.

These qualities help explain why he has steadily risen to ever more important positions of responsibility during his 44 years with Johns Hopkins Medicine—from increasingly critical administrative positions to president of Bayview Medical Center, to president of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, to president of the Johns Hopkins Health System, to executive vice president of Johns Hopkins Medicine. These qualities also explain why he is so widely admired.

Although he will continue to serve as a special adviser to Dean and CEO Paul Rothman for at least a year, Peterson’s retirement in January marks the end of an era at Johns Hopkins. It also highlights a career with few equals in the history of American health care systems.

Between meetings, over a lunch of no-salt vegetable soup and broiled salmon prepared in the hospital’s cafeteria, the slim, bespectacled 69-year-old recently reflected on his role in many of the significant
The Johns Hopkins USFHP One of the Highest-Rated Plans in State, Nation

For the second year in a row, Johns Hopkins USFHP Family Health Plan has been the highest-rated Medicare Advantage plan in the state. The plan has received an overall rating of 5 out of 5 stars, the highest possible rating, from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). A rating of 5 stars means the plan has achieved or exceeded all performance measures. The CMS rated USFHP for the full spectrum of plan performance measures, including quality and outcomes of care, and customer satisfaction.

The USFHP plan is administered by Johns Hopkins Healthcare, a joint venture of Johns Hopkins Medicine and the Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center. The plan is available in Montgomery County, Maryland, and the DC metro area.

“Everything that we do is in pursuit of serving our military families and retirees with the highest quality of care possible.”

-HARRY COOKE, VICE PRESIDENT OF JOHNS HOPKINS USFHP

In Brief

The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, is a national leader in medical research and patient care. The hospital is one of the oldest and largest in the United States, with more than 2,000 physicians and 9,000 employees. The hospital has been designated by the National Institutes of Health as a Research Hospital, and is the only hospital in the United States with a Research Hospital designation. The hospital is also a member of the Johns Hopkins Medicine Institute, a nonprofit research organization that conducts clinical and translational research to improve patient care.

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Ron Peterson and fellow administrators discuss the hospital’s cost-cutting measures. Incidentally, The Johns Hopkins Hospital had operated in the red throughout its first eight decades. Due to its commitment to the foundation’s mission that its hospital care for those who could not pay, the hospital lost money from the day it opened in 1889. When Heyssel became head of the hospital in 1972, it was running a $1.2 million annual deficit. Under the cost improvement program that Peterson implemented, however, the hospital was operating in the black by 1977.

In 1976, Peterson’s next challenge began when he became the fiscal ship of the Children’s Medical and Surgical Center, a 20-bed facility that offered various medical and surgical disciplines as well as specialties.

“I began to feel the need for actually running something, administering a hospital,” Peterson says. “That experience—and the administrative adeptness it instilled—would prove invaluable when Heyssel gave Peterson his next big job: running Baltimore City Hospitals and transforming it into what is now the Johns Hopkins Bayview Medical Center.

1980s The Once-in-a-Career Opportunity

Tracing its history back to the founding of the Baltimore City and County Almshouse in 1773, Baltimore City Hospitals was a storied municipal institution with an inspiring reputation for medical care—including the invention of landmark cardiopulmonary resuscitation techniques and creation of the country’s first intensive care unit. It was called Baltimore City Hospitals because it was a municipal hospital to a chronic hospital that included a nursing home.

In addition, it had an association with The Johns Hopkins Hospital, with its 60 miles from the school of medicine in 1893. Many of its physicians held Johns Hopkins faculty appointments, and Johns Hopkins medical students long had done some training there.

By the early 1980s, Baltimore City Hospitals was operating under annual losses topping $7 million to $8 million. Baltimore mayor, William Donald Schaefer, learned to undo it. Not only had running a major hospital become too complex for city officials; it was also causing a major hemorrhage in the city’s treasury. Schaefer initiated the equivalent of a “request for proposal” for hospital organizations to take over its management.

“Things You Didn’t Know About Mr. Peterson”

Ron Peterson describes himself as “very much a Hopkins person”—who else can say he was of others in his immediate family. His wife, Elizabeth “Rooney” Peterson, became the Department ofMedicine’s first professional billing manager in 1974. She continued during administrative work on medical grant and other financial management projects, earned a master’s degree in administrative sciences from Johns Hopkins University and in 1987 began a career as a registered consultant, mostly for The Johns Hopkins University’s School of Medicine itself.

In 1998, she began volunteering at the Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, where she still works.

The Petersons’ daughter, Susan, graduated in 2009 from The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, completed her residency in the Johns Hopkins Department of Emergency Medicine, and is now an assistant professor of emergency medicine.

Asked how he developed his passion for accuracy and detail, Peterson observes that his father, the co-owner of a small roofing and sheet metal business, did its bookkeeping and paid close attention to the details of that little business. “So maybe that’s where it hit me,” he says.

As a high school student and undergraduates at The Johns Hopkins University, Peterson focused on a medical career—although his mother “always hoped” he would become a minister. “I always thought I was going to become a doctor,” Peterson says. “So I brought all those things together, because, in many ways, I was doing the Lord’s work.”

Although a number of for-profit health care organizations offered proposals, the mayor was concerned they would “not take care of the poor people in a certain service that was very much in need.”

Peterson recalled. “Schaefer wanted assurance that whoever took it on would be fully committed to giving 100 percent for all who needed access. So that’s why I think they gave us the job.”

Heyssel believed that if Johns Hopkins could manage the hospital for a trial period and solve its mammoth deficits, acquiring it would make sense.

In 1980, he chose Peterson to head the group of Johns Hopkins managers who collaborated with City Hospitals’ physician leaders to turn around the beleaguered medical center.

“Block said he needed somebody to come and work with him who not only knew the organization but was recognized as a stabilizing force,” Peterson says.

Peterson became executive vice president and chief operating officer for both The Johns Hopkins Hospital and health system, which then consisted of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Hopkins Bayview and the Wyman Park Health System, which included the then U.S. Public Health Service Hospital on the edge of the university’s Homewood campus and the North Charles Johns Hopkins Hospital.

The recruitment of Peterson as a “stabilizing force” didn’t end the problems between Block and Johns. The medical school dean left Johns Hopkins to become executive vice president of Emory University’s medical center in 1996. Block also departed that year. Edward D. Miller, head of the Department of Anesthesiology, became interim dean, and Peterson was named interim president of both the hospital and the health system—while still remaining president of Johns Hopkins Bayview.

“In 1996, The Johns Hopkins Medical School was established as a unified leadership entity for the hospital and health system,” Peterson recalls. “Miller accepted the position of pediatric executive officer, who would lead both the school of medicine and the overall health system, as well as the university’s vice president for medical affairs. Peterson became president of the hospital and health system. Miller also named Peterson executive vice president of Johns Hopkins Medicine.

“Block and Miller formed a remarkable partnership. They not only solidified an effective governance and management structure,” Peterson recalls. “Block and Miller also solidified an equally dedicated team of administrators and faculty members to undertake extensive development projects and expand Johns Hopkins Medicine’s scope dramatically over the next 16 years until Miller’s retirement.”

“I have friends who wish they had made different decisions,” Miller says. “I’m not quite sure what they would have done differently, but I think they would have ended up doing many of the same things that were successful. But it is clear that Ron Peterson was a key player.”
When a Biology Lecture Turns Personal

A medical student reflects on the day he learned all about the disease that took his young mother’s life.

It was seven days before I finally worked myself to recording the lecture. In the pattern of a cancer trial—risk factors, clinical features, paradigms—*...* but this final lecture was filled with pieces of information that jibed into my moments like ice picks.

May not find en in ence exam ent 1-1-1 on 1.

My dad once said my mom’s tumor looked like Dark Star on her CT scan.

"I have never worked with a human. And then we’ll go to work."
Three Johns Hopkins Medicine employees have received the university’s 2017 Alumni Heritage Award. Established in 1973, the award honors those who have contributed outstanding service over an extended period to the presence of Johns Hopkins University or the activities of the alumni association. The honorees include Deborah Baker, D.N.P., M.S.N., R.N., senior vice president for nursing at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and the Johns Hopkins Health System to become the second medical physicist in the Radiological Society. Mahesh is elected president of the Maryland Commission on Cancer Research and the Maryland Cancer Coalition. The honor recognizes Feinberg’s seminal scientific discoveries and contributions to the field of epigenetics.

Karen Horton, M.D., professor of radiology, has been named director of the Department of Radiology and Biomedical Science. Since February 2016, she has served as interim director of the department as well as chair of the board of Johns Hopkins Imaging. A 19-year Johns Hopkins veteran, Horton’s areas of expertise include body computed tomography (CT) imaging, 3-D post-processing of CT data, and virtual endoscopy. She recently oversaw the creation of Johns Hopkins Community Radiology Division to provide services at Sibley and Suburban hospitals.

Maheshvappa Ma. Mahesh, M.S., Ph.D., professor of radiology and cardiology and chief physician of The Johns Hopkins Hospital, was elected president of the Maryland Radiological Society. Mahesh is the second medical physician in the nation to become president of a local chapter of the American College of Radiology.

Rachel Salas, M.D., associate professor of neurology, has been named director of professional education and interprofessional collaborative practice for the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. She succeeds Laura Hanyok, M.D., now assistant dean for graduate medical education. Salas has served in various medical education roles, including director of the neurology clerkship and medical education for nurse practitioners. In her new role, she will spearhead efforts to advance interprofessional education and partnerships with professional schools and clinical sites.

Andrew Feinberg, M.D., M.P.H., professor and director of the Center for Epigenetics, has received the Association for Molecular Pathology’s 2017 Award for Excellence in Molecular Diagnostics. The honor recognizes Feinberg’s seminal scientific discoveries and contributions to the field of epigenetics.

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Robert Wood, M.D., professor and director of pediatric allergy and immunology and an expert on food allergies and childhood asthma, has been named president-elect of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology.

Bin Wu, Ph.D., assistant professor of biophysics and biophysical chemistry, has received a 2017 Pew Charitable Trusts early-career scholar grant in the biomedical sciences. He will receive four years of flexible funding to pursue foundational research. His lab will investigate the role localized protein synthesis plays in the growth and connection of neurons—work that ultimately could lead to new interventions for conditions such as autism and Alzheimer’s disease.

JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICAL CENTER

Kamal Dhanjani, P.A.-C., anesthesiology and critical care medicine, has been elected president of the Baltimore chapter of the Society of Critical Care Medicine. Dhanjani joined the Department of Anesthesiology and Critical Care Medicine in 2016 and currently serves as the physician assistant manager and co-director of the physician assistant residency program in critical care medicine.

SUBURBAN HOSPITAL

Eric Dolkin, M.D., has been appointed vice president of medical affairs. With more than 20 years of experience in hospital quality and safety, he previously served as chief quality officer and vice president of quality/patient safety for the four-hospital Cruz-Cayman Key West Health System in Pennsylvania.

Jacky Schultz, R.N., M.S.N., C.N.A., executive director of nursing, was recently named one of Washingtonian magazine’s Most Powerful Women of 2017 in the health and medicine category. Named president of Suburban Hospital in 2016, she has served in many leadership roles since joining the staff in 2005.

SIBLEY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Marissa McKeeover, J.D., director of government and community affairs, has been named by the Politico website as a 2017 40 Under 40 Rising Star. She will become an ambassador for the Living Classrooms Foundation, which works to strengthen communities and inspire young people to reach their potential through hands-on education and job training.

JOHNS HOPKINS MEDICINE INTERNATIONAL (JHI)

Jennifer Dunkes has been promoted to project analyst. During the past five years, she has worked with JHI to help manage the launch of JHI’s intranet, and develop the initial design for the first employee engagement and diversity committee.

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SHARING BEST PRACTICES—Kristina Hoerl, a registered nurse educator who specializes in radiology at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, leads a simulation to train nurses and radiology technicians at the Nelson Mandela Children’s Hospital in Johannesburg, South Africa. Hoerl and other Johns Hopkins Medicine experts visited the new hospital in August as part of an assessment and training collaboration. The project is funded by the United States Agency for International Development’s Maternal and Child Survival Program, which is led by Johns Hopkins affiliate Jhpiego. In this exercise, conducted in the CT scan room, Hoerl plays the part of a pediatric patient and helps the group identify areas they could improve related to safety and emergency management. Pictured from left are two CT techs and a radiology nurse, while the hospital’s head radiology nurse looks on from behind. Learn more about the collaboration at hopkinsmedicine.org/dome.