In July 2015, Robert Higgins stepped into his new position as the William Stewart Halsted Professor of Surgery and surgeon-in-chief of The Johns Hopkins Hospital. The cardiothoracic and heart-lung transplant surgeon succeeds colorectal surgeon Jonathan Efron, who served as the interim director since 2014.

“I have to pinch myself because I find myself in a historic leadership opportunity,” says Higgins. “My goal is to continue to build on the foundation already established here at Johns Hopkins—and go even further.”

William Halsted changed the landscape of surgical training 125 years ago. As Johns Hopkins’ first surgeon-in-chief, Halsted built the surgical residency, crafted the first surgical approach that cured patients of breast cancer and oversaw many other innovations that improved patient care.

After Halsted came Dean Lewis, Alfred Blalock, George Zuidema, John Cameron and Julie Freischlag, along with countless innovations and strides in surgical techniques, education and training, and translational research and investigation. Now Higgins continues the tradition in a style he calls “servant leadership.”

“I see myself as a facilitator of the surgical success of my colleagues, fellow faculty members and trainees, who uphold the Johns Hopkins legacy of delivering the finest clinical care while training the next generation of surgeons and facilitating groundbreaking research and discoveries,” says Higgins.

Already, Higgins is an avid supporter of the efforts of his colleagues, including a project that originated with his predecessor. In 2011, Efron joined with other specialists from the societies for surgery, radiology, pathology and oncology to establish standards for care and optimize treatment outcomes for rectal cancer.

In 2015, the standard principles were presented to the American College of Surgeons, which will ultimately decide where to establish the first pilot programs. “The practices enhance the overall experience of patients,” says Efron. “We also think they will lead to better outcomes.”

Higgins also looks forward to setting the standard of excellence for other specialties in surgery. “We have an incredibly gifted and accomplished set of surgeons who exemplify excellence and innovation,” he says. “We will continue to use our resources to invest in their success.”

With more than 90,000 people on the kidney transplant waiting list, it can take years for an individual to receive a deceased-donor kidney. Because of this, transplant surgeon Dorry Segev encourages patients to find a live kidney donor.

Understandably, patients are overwhelmed by this idea, so Segev designed and launched a pilot program in 2010 showing them how to do it. Since then, roughly 25 to 45 percent of all patients in the program have identified a potential living donor.

The only qualification to participate in the Live Donor Champion Program is to have a live donor champion, someone who is willing to be an advocate for and help the patient through the process of finding a living donor. “It can be difficult to find someone willing to donate a kidney, but it isn’t that difficult to find someone who cares for the patient,” says Segev.

Patients and their live donor champions attend a two-hour class once a month for six months. During this time, participants learn the facts about live kidney donation, how to start a conversation

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3 More Years with Her Husband, One Long-Lasting Legacy

For the days after Stephen Reyba retired from the coal mining business in 2011, he went to the hospital in excruciating pain. Diagnosed with pancreatitis, he was sent home with pain killers.

For the next month, Reyba went in and out of two different hospitals, but the same thing always happened: He was sent home with no improvement. Exasperated, his wife, Cindra, turned to the Internet and searched for pancreatitis.

She found information about the pancreas experts at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, and even though she and her husband were in Pennsylvania at the time, Cindra decided Stephen needed to go to The Johns Hopkins Hospital. She quickly chartered a plane, and they flew to Maryland. “He was going downhill fast,” she says.

Just 24 hours later, Stephen’s pancreas was removed by surgeon Kent Stevens. The operation went well, but during Stephen’s recovery, he had some setbacks that required additional procedures. “It seemed like anything that could go wrong with his health did go wrong,” says Cindra.

After many months in the hospital, Stephen was well enough to return home in early 2012. He had a feeding tube and several drains, but Cindra learned how to care for him and arranged for caregivers to provide additional help in their home.

While recovering at home, one of Stephen’s favorite things to do was to take walks around the neighborhood and watch the Food Network. “Even though he couldn’t eat, he still loved food,” says Cindra.

In honor of his love for fine food and drink, the couple visited Napa Valley in the fall of 2013 with some friends. That winter, they spent quality time with their loved ones throughout the holidays.

Unfortunately, in early 2014, Stephen began to have renal failure. Regardless, he and Cindra visited his hometown in Pennsylvania to go to his favorite church on Easter Sunday. Shortly thereafter, in May 2014, Stephen died at home surrounded by his friends and family.

Cindra says if it weren’t for the quality of care Stephen received at The Johns Hopkins Hospital, she wouldn’t have had those three extra years with Stephen after he was diagnosed with pancreatitis.

“The care at The Johns Hopkins Hospital was exceptional,” she says. “The nurses and doctors were all so helpful.”

To show her gratitude, Cindra has made generous donations to benefit the doctors who provided care for her husband: David Efron, Kent Stevens and Albert Chi. As a result, the Stephen Reyba Memorial Fund was established. The goals are to help families dealing with an acute care crisis and to provide enhanced patient and family support and advocacy.

“Stephen and I didn’t go through all of that for nothing,” says Cindra. “I want to stay involved with Johns Hopkins and make donations in his memory to help others going through the same experience we did.”

What Will Your Legacy Be?
A single gift in 1873 from our founding benefactor, Johns Hopkins, inspired a revolution in American medicine. The Johns Hopkins Legacy Society honors Mr. Hopkins and welcomes those who make their own legacy gifts to secure the financial future of Johns Hopkins Medicine.

There are many ways to become a member: Include Johns Hopkins in your estate plan, designate us as beneficiary of a retirement plan or life insurance policy, or give in a way that also provides income to you. To learn more about these and other creative ways to give, visit rising.jhu.edu/giving, or contact the Johns Hopkins Office of Gift Planning at 410-516-7954/800-548-1268 or giftplanning@jhu.edu.


When beloved cardiac surgeon Levi Watkins Jr. died in April of complications from a stroke, the entire Johns Hopkins community mourned. The 70-year-old Watkins had made a name for himself in many ways: as a pioneering surgeon who in 1980 first implanted an automatic defibrillator in a human heart; as a civil rights activist who took part in the Montgomery bus boycotts in the 1950s; and as the first African-American chief resident in cardiac surgery at Johns Hopkins, who later became an academic leader and mentor, driving recruitment of minority students.

“I met him as a medical student applying for surgical training and later interviewed with him as a candidate for leadership positions in the late 2000s,” recalls Robert Higgins, director of surgery at Johns Hopkins. “At each one of those interactions, he was supportive and encouraging as a mentor and as a leader in the field, but he was also an insightful visionary. His legacy in professional inclusion was really what people remember him for.”

With that in mind, faculty members in the Department of Surgery rallied to start a memorial lectureship in Watkins’ name, with the goal of raising $160,000 to create an endowment that will support an annual lecture featuring a renowned speaker who upholds the inclusion, excellence and mentorship values Watkins held dear, says Kathleen Hertkorn, director of development for the department.

The inaugural speaker of the Levi Watkins Jr., M.D., Endowed Memorial Lectureship was Edward Cornwell, a former trauma chief at Johns Hopkins and professor and chairman of the Department of Surgery.
MAKING A DIFFERENCE

at the Howard University College of Medicine, who gave a Grand Rounds talk on Oct. 22 to the Johns Hopkins community.

In the same vein as Watkins, Cornwell is a leader in trauma/critical care medicine, and he also mentors underrepresented minority community members and has a strong community service profile, advocating for violence prevention. “We thought it was appropriate to recognize Levi and invite Eddie as a member of the family to be the inaugural lecturer,” says Higgins. “Levi really blazed a trail for young African-American surgeons like me, and yet ironically, he never lived to see me assume the role as the Halsted chair, something I think he, through his life’s work, was responsible for in many ways.”

In the Spirit of Excellent Care

The 2015 Anne T. Brennan Memorial Lectureship was attended by, from left, Timothy Pawlik, James Brennan, Jeffrey Norton (lecturer), Catherine Boyne, Karen Brennan, Mary Helen Brennan and Peggy Brennan. The Brennan family established the lectureship in 2012 to highlight multidisciplinary collaborations for cancer research and care, in memory of Anne Brennan and the care she received at The Johns Hopkins Hospital.

THOSE WHO GIVE

A gift in memory of Levi Watkins Jr. ensures that future generations of faculty members and students will have the opportunity to learn about inclusion, excellence and mentorship, and honor Watkins’ legacy of passion, advocacy and service. For more information, see bit.ly/levigift.

Tee Off for Surgical Oncology Fellows

During a reception after the annual immixGroup Foundation Charity Golf Tournament at the Golf Club at Lansdowne in Leesburg, Virginia, Jeff Copeland of the immixGroup Foundation, second from left, presented a gift to Matthew Weiss, second from right; Richard Burkhardt far right; and Megan Winner, far left. Copeland organized the annual tournament after his brother was treated for colon cancer at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. Over the years, funding from the event has supported seven surgical oncology fellows at Johns Hopkins and has raised more than $1,175,000 for the Department of Surgery.

A Toast to Pamela Lipsett

To show their gratitude for surgeon Pamela Lipsett, Diana Do, third seat from front left side of the table, and her husband, Quan Nguyen, established the Pamela A. Lipsett, M.D., Endowed Lectureship in 2014. On the night before the second annual lecture in May 2015, the benefactor enjoyed dinner with guest lecturer John Alverdy, fourth seat from the front right side of the table, and members of Johns Hopkins Medicine.

A Lectureship from the Heart

Friends gather at the Miller Family Lectureship in Vascular and Cardiac Disease held at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in April 2015: from left, James Black, Susan Miller, Daniel Clair and Milton “Mickey” Miller Jr. The Miller family established the annual lectureship to support young and innovative surgeons or interventionalists practicing new techniques and treatments for vascular and cardiac disease.

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An App for That

One of the most valuable tools participants get from the Live Donor Champion Program is their own personal stories. Patients write about themselves, how their life has been affected and why they want a transplant. Their champions can then print the stories as handouts, email the stories or make a video of the patient reading the story.

To make the process of writing their stories easier, Johns Hopkins provides a Facebook app to the program participants. Created with liver transplant surgeon Andrew Cameron, the app asks for answers to certain questions and then generates stories in a format that can be posted on Facebook, with links to information about live donation.

To learn more: 410-955-5045

Class Teaches How to Find a Kidney Donor

(continued from front page)

about live kidney donation, and how to identify and access their social networks.

Betsy King, an assistant resident in surgery and manager of the classes, says the champions are ready to go out and start a conversation with people about live donation as soon as the second class is over. “It’s amazing,” she says, “They feel confident to go forth and start talking right away.”

King also says participants are often surprised when they discover all of the people in their social network. “They all brainstorm our loud, listing the groups they know in their community, like their church and volunteer organizations,” she says. “They get ideas from one another and find that their network is larger than they think.”

Segev and King hope to adapt the program for liver transplant patients and expand the program to other transplant centers around the country.