

Alumni Corner



Congratulations to alumnus, **Dr. Debra Wechter** on receiving Virginia Mason Medical Center's (VMMC) highest physician award, "The James Tate Mason Award."

Dr. Debra Wechter currently services as the Director of the Breast Surgery program at Virginia Mason Medical Center.

Dr. Wechter completed her general surgery residency at the University of Washington in 1985. She was the fourth woman to finish a UW Surgery residency and the first female general surgeon at VMMC. She has gone on to have a stellar career in surgery. In the award speech, Dr. Gary Kaplan, Chairman and CEO of VMMC, said that "Dr. Wechter is known for her superb clinical skills; she is intellectually curious and has become their premier breast cancer surgeon. She has dedicated her talents to building an outstanding breast cancer program at VMMC and has been its Director since 1999.....She treats the whole patient and she is an inspiration to women in medicine." He concluded by saying that "Best of all, when I send a patient to her, I have full confidence my patient will get the very best treatment and care."

Dr. Wechter is married to Andrew Bowdle, MD, PhD, a cardiac anesthesiologist at UW Medicine. They have a son, Jacob, who graduated from UW with a double major in Asian Studies and Japanese Language. He is currently teaching English to elementary school students in Kato, Japan. Their daughter, Rachel is a sophomore at University of Puget Sound, majoring in Exercise Science.



Debra Wechter, MD
(circa 1985)

The annual James Tate Mason Award recipient is nominated by his or her peers. An award committee makes the final selection from among the nominated candidates. They base their decision on the individual's professional competence, patient service, teamwork, peer recognition, personal values and leadership.



Jonathan Kohler, MD, General Surgery resident from 2005-2013: "Now that I've been away from UW for a few months, and had a chance to see what my training has done for me, and the sort of surgeon it has made me, I'm writing to say, with more vigor and enthusiasm than these words can ever capture: thank you. I feel at home in the operating

room and no one here is asking me to do things that I can't do, and in most cases haven't done many times before.

"What's totally blown me away, in retrospect, is not the way that I was trained to operate, but the way that I was taught to think. All the exercises that sometimes seemed tedious as a resident have given me an outstanding foundation as a fellow: those long nights reviewing the literature and defending it at M&M, the demand to always be able to explain why we're doing what we're doing in our management of patients, the ability to juggle a 60 patient service and see 30 consults in a day, the constant repetition of full H&Ps, even in the middle of the night, learning sick from not sick—all were essential to making me the doctor I am. I've been able to use the strength of thought, analysis, questioning, and hardheaded determination that the UW bred into me.

"Such things are hard to measure, of course. I couldn't be prouder to know that I'll always be able to say I'm UW trained."

ATTENTION ALUMNI!

Let us know what you are up to now!

If you would like to share news about your career and family or reflect upon your residency experience in UW Department of Surgery, we want to hear about it to publish in *Surgery Synopsis*.

Please send your updates and photos to surgeditors@uw.edu.