

SURGERY Synopsis

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Chairman’s Message



Carlos A. Pellegrini, MD,
FACS, FRCSI (Hon.)
The Henry N. Harkins
Professor & Chair

Friends & Colleagues of the Department of Surgery: This column and issue of Surgery Synopsis reflect upon the “bookends” of our professional lives as surgeons, from those who are beginning residency, to those who have recently graduated and are beginning their careers, to one whose career has come to an end. In observing all these stages, I have been profoundly reminded what a privilege it is to be a surgeon; but also how stressful and out of balance this life can become if we do not pay attention to all aspects. Life’s many parts must be acknowledged and harmonized to be a life well lived.

We have an exceptional example of a life well lived that we have paused to celebrate and grieve in recent weeks. The whole Department, the School of Medicine, as well as professional organizations, family and friends grieve the passing of **Dr. Alexander Clowes**. Dr. Clowes passed away on July 7, 2015 of a brain glioblastoma. This is a tremendous loss for all who knew him, particularly his family, but also a very big loss for the

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Alex Clowes: A Life Well-Lived

Alexander (Alec) Whitehill Clowes (pictured right), professor of surgery at the University of Washington and renowned researcher in vascular diseases, died of a brain glioblastoma on July 7, 2015, at the age of 68.

Alec was born into a family with a legacy of medical research. His forbearer, Sir William Clowes, physician to the admiral of the British fleet as it fought the Spanish Armada, published in 1588 one of the earliest textbooks on surgery in the English language. Alec’s grandfather was George Henry Alexander Clowes, PhD, the scientist and mastermind behind the purification of insulin for clinical use, and his father, George Henry Alexander Clowes, Jr., was an academic surgeon and researcher at Case Western Reserve and Harvard.

It therefore is no surprise that Alec’s favorite memories were of science classes in high school (Phillips Exeter Academy, 1964) and college (Harvard College, 1968) followed by his own



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Department, for the School of Medicine and academic medicine. At the young age of 68, Alec had many things he still wanted to accomplish in life. Many of them were related to medicine; but as many were his other passions in life: more time with his family, more travel, the Seattle Symphony, writing and passing on wisdom and support to the next generation of medical discoverers and musical artists.

When Alec and his wife, Susan, were first told of the diagnosis, he (and they) did not despair; rather they made every day count. While vigorously attacking the glioblastoma with the newest of therapies, he accomplished so much. He completed a book which will soon be published; **The Clowes Fund**, at his request, endowed a chair in surgery; he spent a lot of time with family and friends; he spent time at the Seattle Symphony; and he prepared others to take on his 30 year-funded research project in vascular biology, holding working sessions in his home with his cadre of research staff. Most importantly, he continued to be a friend to us all. You will read a longer memorial to Alec on page 1, and I invite you to watch the very moving [video](#) that has been made by the Division of Vascular Surgery honoring his life. In addition to my deep sadness at losing a friend, I am in awe of his spirit and determination to wring everything possible out of life. This too has had a profound effect upon me and our entire Department. Alec lived his life gracefully and well.

With enormous joy, mixed with some sadness at their leaving, I congratulate our graduating residents and fellows who are going out into the world to endeavor to become the next generation of "Alecs." Unsolicited reports we receive from our newly graduated residents and fellows often mention how well-prepared they feel for the next phase of their career. I am proud of this Department, the teaching

faculty, and most of all our Education leaders who have contributed so greatly to their lives. Our Program Directors and Associate Program Directors are to be commended. Under the leadership of



Horvath

Dr. **Karen Horvath**, Associate Chair of Education and Director of the General Surgery Residency Program, the UW Department of Surgery general residency program is strong and remains in the top 10 residency programs in the country. She is joined by General Surgery Associate Residency Program Directors (site directors) Dr. **Venu Pillarisetty** at **University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC)**, Dr. **Lisa McIntyre** at **Harborview Medical Center (HMC)**, Dr. **Kenneth Gow** at **Seattle Children's Hospital (SCH)** and Dr. **Dana Lyng** at the **VA Puget Sound Health Care System (VA)**.

Our ACGME accredited specialty residency and fellowship programs are in equally strong hands: Dr. **Jeff Friedrich**, Program Director for the Integrated Plastic Surgery Residency Program is doing a splendid job as the Director of Plastic Surgery Education, aided by Dr. **Kari Keys**, Associate Program Director for the Integrated Plastic Surgery Residency Program. Dr. **Niten Singh**, who just completed his first year as Vascular Residency and Fellowship Director, has done a magnificent job. He is joined in this work by Associate Program Director, **Elina Quiroga**, Assistant Professor in the Division of Vascular Surgery. And, the Cardiothoracic Residency and Fellowship Program under the direction of Dr. **Doug Wood**, with the dedicated assistance of Dr. **Nahush Mokadam**, continues to produce some of the best CT surgeons in the country. Dr. **Lester Permut** at SCH

continues to provide strong leadership for the Congenital Heart Fellowship Program.

I am also thrilled to meet our new residents – a great new group – and equally eager to continue teaching and assisting the residents currently here. You will read more about our graduating and new residents, as well as our residents who are taking a clinical hiatus to devote a year or two in labs to develop their research skills, on page 10.

Taking Care of Ourselves and Each Other

"Wellness," and "well-being" are themes that have been brought up in each of our faculty groups – junior to professor – as well as in our trainee groups. This year this theme was emphasized by the passing of Alec Clowes, who was a man who understood and lived a fulfilling life.

There is always more to do, to explore, to create, and learn than there is time. It is hard to strike equipoise between giving and getting, activity and rest, responsibility and relaxation. Surgeons are notorious for being over-achievers in their professional lives, often developing that part of their lives to the detriment of family and other passions. While each person ultimately has to find well-being for themselves, in the last 5-10 years there has been much more emphasis on incorporating opportunities at the personal and system-wide level for faculty, trainees and staff to experience, learn and practice wellness and balance within their lives.



Carlos A. Pellegrini, MD,
FACS, FRCSI (Hon.)
The Henry N. Harkins
Professor & Chair

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Wellness and the Trainee

The **Graduate Medical Education (GME)** office, under the direction of the School, recognizes that residency and fellowship years are times of particularly high stress. The GME office has made wellness an institutional priority for the graduate education years, providing help with the myriad of stressors that affect the lives of trainees and their families.

The **GME Wellness Service** has expanded beyond its core service of confidential counseling with a mission to support work-life balance and well-being. To that end, it offers numerous events, seminars and workshops, cheap or free tickets to athletic and cultural events, and sessions to help plan life after residency (including financial planning). A sample of what is offered to trainees can be found in the bi-weekly "**Wellness Corner**," which has become a well-known and referred-to resource among trainees.

The variety and depth of programs offered are based upon regular surveys to residents with questions about what UW Medicine GME as well as their individual programs can do to support them better through these years. I have been pleased to see that an offshoot of the Wellness Service has been the establishment of University of Washington Network of Underrepresented Residents and Fellows **UW NURF**.

Wellness and the Faculty Member

In 2012, Dr. Ramsey realized that the UW Medicine community would be unable to achieve its mission of improving the health of the public if its own faculty and staff were not healthy themselves. He charged a UW School of Medicine Wellness Committee to perform and publicize an environmental scan to be used to guide efforts that support wellness, then further charged this group to initiate pilot projects promoting balance and

mental health; to explore and potentially implement a peer support pilot; and finally make recommendations for future steps to promote a scalable and sustainable program. Dr. **Norm Beauchamp**, Professor and Chair of Radiology, and Dr. **Claudia Finkelstein**, Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of General Internal Medicine, were asked to lead this effort.

The Wellness Committee worked to identify barriers to individual commitments to wellness and found that a substantial barrier is that many people place wellness in the discretionary category – an "optional" effort to be undertaken after they complete their daily professional work.

Since that time, a great many efforts have been launched in support of faculty wellness including inauguration of a Peer Counseling Program. I am pleased to let you know that the Department of Surgery, under the direction of Dr. **Eileen Bulger** and Dr. **Jeff Friedrich**, has launched a Peer Counseling Program. Please read the article that outlines this Department service on page 15.

Another barrier to well-being that has come up in our own Faculty Breakfasts is that it has become harder to know everyone and build community as the Department has grown bigger. To some extent this is inevitable and the reality we live with; however, esprit des corps is also important. To the extent possible, we encourage circles of interest – whether professional or personal – within the larger group to combat this barrier, whether they are organized by outside interests, by specialty or by common age groups.

We are also thinking of new ways to use our social media and this newsletter to encourage community. To that end, we are introducing a feature called "#Getting to Know DoS," in which a faculty or staff member is asked a series of questions that

allow others to find out more about that person outside of the professional environment. In this issue, we are featuring Dr. **Andrew Wright**

from the Division of General Surgery. I think you will find some of his interests, hobbies and personal goals to be most intriguing.

We are making positive steps and personal wellness is vital to professional satisfaction and to achieving our mission of improving the health of the public. I would say that at whatever point you find balance and well-being, a commitment to personal wellness is time well invested.

Our featured researchers are Drs. **Jeff Friedrich** and **Kari Keys**, whose work in the areas of education and simulation in the Plastic Surgery residency program has garnered them a grant from the **Center for Leadership in Medical Education (CLIME)**. This is innovative and impressive work.

We also continue to share newly published papers and, as always, honors and awards received by our superb faculty.

I hope you will enjoy reading this issue of *Surgery Synopsis* and, along with the Department, recognize the young talent coming into our system, reflect on the importance of well-being, and celebrate the splendid life of Dr. Alec Clowes.

Sincerely,

Carlos A. Pellegrini, MD, FACS,
FRCSI (Hon.)
The Henry N. Harkins Professor & Chair
Department of Surgery
University of Washington



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FACS, FRCSI (Hon.)
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