

What Makes the VA Unique?—Reflections from Former Trainees

These are reflections of former UW Medicine Students/Residents who did some portion of their training at the VA. There are a number of references made to the late Dr. Hubert “Hub” Radke, who was the former Chief of Surgery at the VA. Enjoy these vignettes.

“I was (in residency) at the UW from 1991 to 1998. Some favorites: - Hub Radke saying, ‘Ben, I’ll never be as good a surgeon as you. Do you know why? Because, I’ll never have help as good as me, dammit!’ I remember a patient of mine as he was wheeled to the operating room for a colostomy. His wife was walking next to the gurney. She kissed her husband and said to him, ‘I’ll see you after surgery, I am going to find some shoes to match your bag.’”

—Ben Maser, MD

“I rotated through the VA as a cardiovascular (CV) resident in 1992. During my time there, I would view Mt. Rainier every day (that it was visible) on my way to work. I always longed to climb it! Well...I came back after I finished my residency and climbed it. While on the top, I reflected on my time spent in Seattle training to be a CV surgeon. What happened next is really something I cannot explain. I decided to climb the 7 summits, the tallest peak on all seven continents. I just finished this last year after summiting Mt. Vinson in Antarctica. I am here to tell you that I would have saved a lot of time and trouble (not to mention expense) had I not participated in the VA experience!!! Thanks very much for a walk down memory lane...I can still picture Rainier with that early morning sun shining on its snowy peak!”

—Frank Slachman, MD

“During my VA rotation Bob Schaller was the senior resident on the ward and every now and then during the rotation he would not show up. We would call his wife and she would say that he left in the middle of the night and she didn’t know when he would be back. He would show up six weeks later and would not talk about where he had been or what he had been doing. Years later we found out that he was working for the CIA or some such government agency and doing mountain climbing placing atomic bomb detection devices at high altitude. That was his ‘equivalent’ to ‘military service’ so he would not get drafted. THEN after he finished his residency they drafted him anyway!!! He can probably give you more specific details BUT that is the way I remember it.” —Duane Bietz, MD, Residency class of 1972

“Prior to the internet, Hub Radke was the ‘Wikipedia’ of General Surgery at the VA. Dr. Radke and I performed a right hemicolectomy in an 85-year-old, high-risk veteran in 25 minutes from start to finish. After closing the skin, Hub looked at me and said, ‘Now that’s the way it should be done.’ Currently, I wish all of my appendectomies went as well.” —Thomas T. Sato MD, FACS, FAAP



Ron Maier, MD

“Back in the old days, training at the VA meant exposure to Dr. Hub Radke, ‘Father of MIS’, known then as ‘keyhole surgery’ where every abdominal operation known to man could be performed through an incision smaller than that required for a hand assisted port site. His Chief Residents in 1976 gave him the notable ‘Radke Sucker’ plaque, which consisted of a metal Yankauer with a number 10 blade soldered to the end of it. Very challenging, sometimes bloody, but great training.” —Ronald V. Maier, MD, FACS

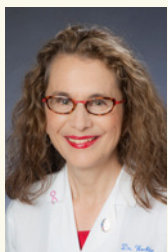
“I seem to recall Ed Boyle ordering 2 units of BUN stat!”
—Lily Chang, MD

“I was the intern holding the camera for Dr. Hub Radke’s first laparoscopic cholecystectomy at the VA. Dana Lyngne was guiding him through it. Dana was very patient until the camera light went out and the screen went blank. Hub simply kept operating without hesitation and with great certainty stating ‘I don’t need the damn light, I know where everything is.’ Needless to say, Dana went apoplectic and everything turned out ok.” —Martin Schreiber, MD

“I loved my experiences there. I still tell the story about putting in my very first chest tube ever as an intern at the VA over the weekend in July. It was during a code and during chest compressions! What an experience!” —Erin Gilbert, MD

“Often as a female physician we are assumed to be nursing staff. I walked in to one of the rooms with four patients—one patient I didn’t know yelled at me, assuming I was a nurse. Before I could respond, my patient yelled back, ‘Hey, that’s my doctor!’ It was my intern year and the first time someone called me ‘their doctor.’ Pretty good memory.”
—Nicole Kansier, MD

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Debra Wechter, MD

“I was at the VA during my residency from 1980-85, and then on staff as an acting clinical instructor from 1985 to 1988. I always remember Hub Radke’s favorite surgical instrument—a suction with a scalpel at the tip! He was a great mentor—there was no complication he hadn’t seen and no situation he couldn’t help you get out of in the operating room!”

—Debra Wechter, MD

“I had great rotations through the VA - the Univ. Hospital opened during my 3rd year as I recall. So our rotations were largely between HMC and the VA. Drs. Bell and Tolstedt were excellent mentors. My research year was spent in the VA research lab of Gene Strandness, which I guess made me his first ‘fellow.’

“I completed the program in 1963 - the Harkins years.

It was a great 5 years - 6 counting my Harborview internship. Lots of long hours, hard work but with a flood of memories - and somehow time to conceive 3 kids! It helped to be living in Yesler Terrace right behind the Harborview ER. I had a wonderful career at the Wenatchee Valley Clinic and was fortunate to continue to assist - finally hanging it up on my 81st birthday. Often wished we had had an opportunity to get back to the VA for a visit. I know it still must be an integral part of the University program.

“PS: and the noon hour volleyball games could be vicious. I had to have a Watson-Jones procedure on my left ankle. I had it done when I was on my VA path rotation with Dr. Knutson.”

—Gerald (Jerry) Gibbons, MD

“I graduated from UW in General Surgery in 1993 and Vascular Surgery in 1995. Spent a lot of time at the VA. Here are a couple of vignettes:

‘Going transplanar’ in the OR with Hub Radke: Hub had one of the softest hearts encased in one of the gruffest personalities I’ve ever encountered. His office was stacked

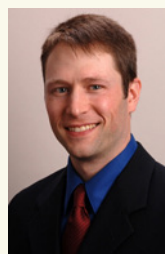


Dr. Hubert “Hub” Radke’s Office

with 4-5 foot high towers of papers and journals growing from the floor like stalagmites.

“Before many vascular cases, Ted Kohler in his very droll but straight-faced manner, would ask the circulating nurse to call Risk Management and warn them that the vascular team was about to go to work.” —Larry W. Kraiss, MD

“As a Thoracic Surgery resident, I was arrested by the VA police while taking a picture of a Christmas tree. I went to the VA booking room in scrubs where they confiscated my camera. My patient (with an esophageal perforation) was on the table. They eventually cleared me of wrong-doing - several months later.” —Mike McMullan, MD



Erik Van Eaton, MD

“Hub Radke was a great surgeon and a fine person. I learned a lot from him.”

—David Simonowitz, MD

“A well-respected resident a few years ahead of me was on call at the VA one night. He was awoken in the night by a new ICU nurse who was reporting an abnormal laboratory value. ‘Doctor,’ the story goes, ‘The labs just came back on your patient, and there is an extremely low BUN level, it says it’s less than 4!’ The resident, with a measured tone, yet sense of urgency, replied. ‘Listen, here’s what I need you to do. Call the Puget Sound Blood Center. Ask them to release 2 units of Emergency Uncrossmatched BUN. Call me as soon as it arrives!’ The story goes that he was written up and had a little meeting with the residency program director the next day...”

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“Another – very true – anecdote was that the residents referred to the two places to get food as ‘proximal’ and ‘distal.’ We found it very ironic in the late 90’s/early 2000’s that ‘distal’ was a Burger King... We loved seeing our patients standing out front in the afternoon with a cigarette in one hand and a Whopper in the other...”

–Erik Van Eaton, MD

“Hub Radke, MD was Chief of Surgery at the VA during my training [1975-1980]. He was a great educator and a wealth of surgical experience... His language could be very colorful at times. There is a story about him assisting a resident with a difficult common duct exploration. He said ‘be bold young man’ shortly followed by ‘oh *\$%*! You cut the duct.’” –Robert L. Howisey, MD

Pellegrini Installed As 94th President of American College of Surgeons — Continued from page 11

Kristine and Julie, and twin grandchildren who all live in San Francisco. Their two Golden Retriever siblings, Pancho and Melba, bring additional joy to their lives.

Source: American College of Surgeons Press Release /

Date: October 6, 2013

Save the Dates

20TH ANNUAL SCHILLING RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM & LECTURE

Friday, January 31, 2014, 4:00pm

Timothy R. Billiar, MD
George Vance Foster
Professor & Chair
Department of Surgery
University of Pittsburgh

“Of Men and Mice:
An Iterative Strategy to Dissect the
Immune Response to Trauma”

Location: Magnuson Health Sciences
Building, Hogness Auditorium

A reception will be held in the 3rd floor
Magnuson Health Sciences Building
lobby at 5:00pm
(immediately following Dr. Billiar’s lecture)

Please see the
Department of Surgery’s
monthly Grand Rounds
schedule under
[Special Events](#) on our website:
www.uwsurgery.org