

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 is my last Chair Column as Chair of the Department of Surgery. My new position as UW Medicine Chief Medical Officer (CMO) begins on December 1, 2015. I am excited for the prospects of the future of UW Medicine and the extraordinary opportunity that I have been given to continue to contribute to this great organization.

In 1993, I became Chair at a time when the Department was facing serious challenges. As I started my tenure I was inspired by its rich history and in particular by some of the Chairs that preceded me, most notably Henry N. Harkins, Alvin K. Merendino, John Schilling, Jim Carrico and though interim, Alec Clowes. A great foundation existed and I felt privileged to become the guardian of this Department. I vowed, whether my tenure was short or long, to do my utmost to make it the best it possibly could be. As I leave the Department, I leave knowing it is stronger, bigger and better than when I came. There are so many excellent faculty and staff to carry on the mission of this Department, and, in the months and years ahead, move it forward so that it remains relevant and strong in the ever-changing currents of Healthcare.

Many people have asked me what I will miss the most about stepping down as Chair. I have thought a lot about this. I do love being in the OR; that part of my career is mostly over. I will definitely miss performing surgery. I will miss teaching and mentoring residents and fellows. Teaching and training future surgeons has been the most inspiring and fulfilling part of my career. I would not have known that early on; but I do know now. While I will still have interaction with trainees, it will be in a much more limited way. I will miss that greatly. But most of all, as I think of leaving the day-to-day interactions with this Department, I realize that what I will really miss are the people. From staff, to residents and fellows, to faculty, there is a spirit of collaboration and deep engagement with their work. Further, there is a spirit of inclusiveness and mutual respect that is rare. This is the thing I am proudest of: positive, engaged and energized people who come to work every day ready to unleash their talent and make great things happen.

I am blessed to have early on found my life’s avocation; that of being a surgeon. I am further blessed that my life’s path has led me to practice in this place and with these people. I am also blessed that while I’m stepping down, I am not saying goodbye. I’m just “down the hall.”

Sincerely,

Carlos A. Pellegrini, MD, FACS, FRCSI (Hon.)
The Henry N. Harkins Professor & Chair
Department of Surgery
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Dr. Carlos A. Pellegrini and members of the Harkins Surgical Society, Harkins Annual Reception at ACS – Chicago, IL 2015

Editor’s Note: There are too many statistics of comparison and “firsts” to list them here though some are mentioned in the table on page 3. We have also provided a link to the presentation of the [Department Then and Now](#).

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Chairman's Message

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“What a Daunting Task!”

What a daunting task! When Dean Ramsey asked me to step in as Interim Chair of Surgery with Dr. Pellegrini taking on his new role as UW Medicine Chief Medical Officer and Vice President for Medical Affairs, my immediate thought was that no one can fill those big shoes, no one can sit in *that* Chair.

Like many in our department, Carlos is a big reason I am here. And Carlos has been the foundation of a great department filled with great people. It is hard to imagine “life after Carlos,” but the good news is that we don’t really need to, at least not yet. Fortunately, Dr. Pellegrini is only a few offices away, and we can count on him to continue to wield his influence and leadership on behalf of UW Medicine in ways that will make us better, and will make us proud.

I am one of those few people in our department that came to UW before Carlos. Dave Ashbaugh was the Interim Chair who signed my offer letter; although it was [Ed Verrier](#) who really recruited me and was the reason that I thought UW was the best place for me. Dr. Verrier had a vision of creating a great Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery, and I have been proud to be part of that vision, and lucky to have him as a mentor and friend. My instincts were right about Ed, he has always been a visionary leader, and UW has been the right place for me to commit my whole professional career.

Within months of arriving in Seattle as an over-eager, deer-in-the-headlights assistant professor, there were rumors of the arrival of a young new Chair from University of California San Francisco; someone Ed Verrier knew well from their time together there. Feeling the automatic anxiety of what the new leadership would mean for me, I did everything I could to learn about Dr. Pellegrini. I now have 23 years of experience to relate the impact of Dr. Pellegrini on me and on the department that we call home.

From Carlos, I have been the beneficiary of his support, his attention, his guidance and his mentorship. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought I would sit in his office as Interim

Chair (nor in the wildest dreams of those who trained me and tolerated me early in my career!). But Carlos has created an environment and a culture within the department that celebrates our individual strengths and idiosyncrasies, that creates high expectations, and helps us deliver on those expectations.

I know of no one in surgery who is more professionally accomplished than Dr. Pellegrini – three honorary fellowships, the French Medal of Honor, accolades and awards from around the world, and president of innumerable societies,

most notably the [American College of Surgeons](#) and the [American Surgical Association](#).

Yet what I have seen in Carlos is humility about his own accomplishments, and pride in the accomplishments of his faculty and residents. Most of us have been the recipient of a note or email or kind word from Dr. Pellegrini, who notices when we achieve a milestone or receive an honor. I know that his biggest pride is not in what he has done himself, but what his team has done, and we are the lucky ones to be part of his team.

The inset box in this issue ([page 3](#)) lists just a few of the many major developments in the Department of Surgery under Carlos’ leadership. It is amazing to me to look back at where we were in the early 1990s, and to see where we are now. Our department has grown more

than two-fold, we have added a breadth and depth of programs that is enviable to any similar department, research expenditures have more than tripled, and the department has a reputation and stature that is recognized worldwide. However, in my mind, it is the intangibles and the less obvious metrics that make us a truly great department and represent Dr. Pellegrini’s legacy the best.

First and foremost, under Carlos’ leadership, the residency and fellowship programs in the Department of Surgery have flourished. Without question, they are considered the best in the



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I have become so accustomed to the UW Surgery culture that now I take it for granted – until I go to a national meeting and talk with my colleagues from other places, or visit another academic medical center as a visiting professor. It is those times that I am reminded of the incredible degree of mutual respect, humanism, collaboration, and integrity that I am surrounded by every day here in our department’s community.

– *Dr. Douglas E. Wood*

(continued on page 3)

Chairman's Message

Continued from page 2

	1993	2015
Number of faculty	49	103
Research expenditures	\$3.5 million	\$11 million
Endowments	1 Endowed Chair & 1 Endowed Professorship	10 Endowed Chairs & 9 Endowed Professorships
Residents trained	48	83
Residency programs	General Surgery and Independent Plastic Surgery	General Surgery, Integrated Plastic Surgery, Integrated Cardiothoracic Surgery, and Integrated Vascular Surgery

country. The general surgery residency is the jewel in the crown; our core program that attracts the best medical school graduates from around the U.S. And now we have integrated residencies in Plastic Surgery, Vascular Surgery, and Cardiothoracic Surgery as well. Dr. Pellegrini has created an environment of inclusion, educational priority, and diversity that has allowed each of these programs to rank within the top few programs nationally within their respective specialties. Added to that, we have fellowships in Pediatric Surgery, Surgical Critical Care, Transplant Surgery, Congenital Cardiac Surgery, Minimally Invasive Surgery, Burn, Hand Surgery, Craniofacial, and Microsurgery Plastic Surgery that add areas of expertise and prestige to our surgical training programs. I would argue we are unrivaled in the United States.

Our residency programs are a great example of the health of the Department of Surgery. Most would look at case numbers, diversity of training environments (hospitals), and solid didactic components as the reason for educational success in surgery. However, the real intangible – the place where Dr. Pellegrini has made the Department of Surgery truly great – is in our culture and our people.

I have become so accustomed to the UW Surgery culture that now I take it for granted – until I go to a national meeting and talk with my colleagues from other places, or visit another academic medical center as a visiting professor. It is those times that I am reminded of the incredible degree of mutual respect, humanism, collaboration, and integrity that I am surrounded by every day here in our department's community. I urge all of us to recognize how special these relationships with each other and with our teams are, and not take them for granted nor underestimate their impact and importance as the *real* reason we are great. That culture, that kindness, that moral compass is where I feel Carlos leads us quietly and confidently. It is almost always unspoken, yet Carlos leads by example: we see it in how he treats the residents and the staff; we see it in the way he greets a medical assistant or a billionaire donor with the same interest and thoughtfulness; we see it in the deeply held values and sense of fairness he brings to meetings and to decisions.

Two years ago I gave an address as the outgoing president of the Society for Thoracic Surgery and tried to relate the impact and influence of Dr. Pellegrini on my own life and career. I told them, "Carlos Pellegrini is my boss; but more than a boss he is a daily example of integrity and emotional intelligence in his dealings with people and his leadership of organizations. Carlos holds a depth of human understanding and strength of moral character that I can only aspire to. But aspire to it I do, for I have this outstanding pillar of integrity to model and to work beside every day. We should all be so lucky to have mentors like Carlos, and I would encourage each of us to seek out and to imitate those people that we so admire."

That is what I believe makes Dr. Pellegrini so special, and so treasured by all of us. He is beloved by everyone in the Department of Surgery, for good reason. Fortunately the culture and the direction of the Department of Surgery is on incredibly solid ground due to his leadership and influence. Dr. Pellegrini's influence and the foundation of the department will be enduring, and now the rest of us are responsible for carrying on his vision, sense of purpose, and quality of community that is the reason we are so lucky and so proud to be part of UW Surgery. Thank you Carlos, for a great ride; let us know if we get off track and need some gentle redirection. We want to be always better and to continue to make you proud of your department.

Sincerely,

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