

# ED VERRIER, PROFESSOR & FORMER DIVISION CHIEF OF CARDIOTHORACIC SURGERY, RETIRES

DR. DOUGLAS E. WOOD, THE HENRY N. HARKINS PROFESSOR AND CHAIR



On February 29th, 2020, Dr. Edward D. Verrier retired from the Department of Surgery after a long and storied career as a true triple-threat clinical surgeon, teacher, and scientist. February 29th is a rare day, occurring only once every four years, but Dr. Verrier's retirement is once-in-a-lifetime. His impact and influence within the Department as well as his national leadership in surgical education, make Dr. Verrier stand out as one of the leading cardiothoracic surgeons of a generation.

Dr. Verrier (Ed) completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Notre Dame. (There are several other notable Fighting Irish graduates within the Department). He then completed medical school at Tufts University School of Medicine followed by general surgery and cardiothoracic surgery training at the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). Ed developed a strong foundation in basic science research during his time as a research fellow in the Cardiovascular Research Institute at UCSF. An important mentor and influence for Ed was Dr. Paul Ebert, Chair of Surgery at UCSF, an international leader in congenital cardiac surgery and former Executive Director of the American College of Surgeons. After completion of his clinical and research training, Dr. Verrier was recruited to UCSF to serve as Chief

of Cardiothoracic Surgery for the San Francisco VA Hospital. He was enormously successful as a clinical cardiothoracic surgeon as well as a federally funded surgeon scientist at UCSF. Of note, he also developed a friendship with one of his colleagues, Dr. Carlos Pellegrini, (UW Surgery Chair 1993–2015), who was developing a national reputation as an outstanding academic general surgeon. Dr. Verrier was recruited as Chief of the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery at the University of Washington (UW) in 1989—a mere 5 years after completion of his fellowship training and one of the youngest cardiothoracic surgery chiefs in the country.

When Ed accepted the chief position at UW, the program was strong in clinical cardiac surgery, had very little thoracic and no congenital cardiac surgery, consisted of a cardiothoracic fellowship program on probation, and had no academic profile. UW cardiothoracic surgery was definitely a “fixer-upper,” a program with promise within a great institution, but a program with a lot of deficits that needed attention. This would be a daunting task for even a senior surgeon, but Ed approached program development at UW with his characteristic optimism and enthusiasm, methodically identifying goals, creating strategies and tactics, all with the vision of turning UW cardiothoracic surgery into a nationally prominent program. Dr. Verrier recruited new faculty to round out the clinical programs, established his own funded translational research program into a foundation for resident research training and faculty development, and he “walked the walk” in demonstrating a commitment to surgical education that leap-frogged UW cardiothoracic surgery into one of the top five training programs in the country.

The triple-threat is a hard thing to achieve in academic surgery because it is challenging to stand out as a clinician and educator while also being successful as a surgeon scientist. As a clinician, Ed is renowned within our institution and within our region as a “surgeon’s surgeon.” He’s the master technical surgeon other surgeons send their toughest cases to. Ed was the surgeon who always had the 6th time redo, adult congenital cardiac operation—which is very high-stakes and incredibly complex. He cared for these patients with compassion and grit, mixed with the right measure of self-confidence and a creativity that helped him solve seemingly unsolvable problems. As a scientist, Dr. Verrier continued a federally-funded translational research laboratory for the majority of his career, training countless research fellows and was sought after as a role model for academic cardiothoracic surgeons. As UW cardiothoracic surgery built a reputation under Dr. Verrier, his leadership was also increasingly sought for major national positions in

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Typical Day in post surgical clinic drawing the operation on a pillow



Josh Hermsen's last Day as fellow in CT Surgery

our cardiothoracic surgery organizations. Highlights include Ed's election as President of the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association, President of the Western Thoracic Surgical Association (WTSA), Vice-Chair of the Thoracic Surgery Residency Review Committee, The Golden Heart Honoree for the American Heart Association, and the David J Dugan Distinguished Service Award from the WTSA, to name a few.

While always an outstanding surgeon and scientist, perhaps Dr. Verrier is best known for his commitment to outstanding surgical education and his seminal leadership that has indelibly improved cardiothoracic surgical training in the United States and has made a positive mark on surgical training at UW. While many careers are highlighted by titles, grant funding, papers published, and honors, Ed is most proud of the residents he has trained. This is what he loved most in surgery and what continued to keep him excited, engaged, and enthusiastic through his amazing career as a surgeon educator. He influenced everyone around him, promoting deliberate practice, the intention of helping residents to operate starting on day one and a disciplined approach to progressive resident autonomy that has helped launch the careers of leading cardiothoracic surgeons around the country.

Dr. Verrier served as Division Chief for the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery for 20 years and then had an opportunity to lead and revolutionize cardiothoracic surgery training. With a call to action to modernize and improve surgical education, the major thoracic surgery organizations committed to a new paradigm of collaboration and innovation, creating the Joint Council of Thoracic Surgical Education (JCTSE). Ed was selected amongst the highest caliber candidates nationally to be the Surgical Director of the JCTSE. During his tenure, he substantially upgraded the national level of education for thoracic surgery, including developing the thoracic surgery "brain," an online curriculum, and a concept of "flipping the classroom" for thoracic didactic conferences. He made repeated and substantial contributions to the academic literature in education, including being selected as American College of

Surgeons' Gibbon Lecturer, where he presented on "The elite athlete.... The master surgeon."

Dr. Verrier is one of those rare individuals who won our John K. Stevenson Resident Teaching Award as a specialty surgeon. He was also awarded the UW School of Medicine's (SOM) Bruce Gilliland Teaching Award. This award is the highest UW SOM teaching award, given to the one of over 3,000 faculty members who has had the broadest impact on student and resident education. Dr. Verrier also won the Thoracic Surgery Residents Association's Socrates Teaching Award for the best national educator in thoracic surgery and last year was inducted into the highly prestigious American College of Surgeons' Academy of Master Surgeon Educators.

It is difficult to overstate the profound legacy Ed has left after 31 years of incredible leadership at UW Medicine. He had the vision and the will to take a middling clinical cardiac surgery program and turn it into a world-class academic and clinical cardiothoracic division, especially renowned for surgical education. His commitment to excellence in everything he does has made a permanent impact on our department, UW Medicine, and cardiothoracic surgery. Those of us who have learned from Ed, benefited from his mentorship and have followed his ideals while working alongside him, will miss his daily presence, but we can feel grateful for the lasting influence he has had on our lives. Congratulations for an amazing career Ed!



Valet D'Coer (Jack of Hearts), Ed with his jumping face on (left); Ed 11th hole playing at Augusta National; not in the Masters (right)