Patricia Dillon, M.D., M.P.H., ’86: One for all
By Laura Stephenson Carter

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Dillon has chosen surgery “because I wanted to do something before they get to be in surgery.”

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Dillon loved her job. Growing up in rural upstate New York, however, she never imagined she’d one day be responsible for the health of so many people. In fact, she wouldn’t have it if she’d listened to her high-school guidance counselor. The elderly, blue-haired woman scooped Dillon for wanting to be a hospital administrator and advised her to consider secretarial or nursing school instead.

“I was so embarrassed. She just dressed me down,” Dillon recalls. “I thought, ‘I’ll never tell anyone my interests again.’”

Luckily, another guidance counselor overheard the exchange and discreetly encouraged Dillon to skip her senior year in high school and enroll at a nearby community college instead. Dillon took his advice, went on to graduate from Syracuse University’s School of Science and Forestry, and eventually made her way to Dartmouth Medical School.

Dillon thrived at DMS. “When I look back at my time at Dartmouth, and describe the experience to others, I am not sure if I’m speaking of the faculty as instructors, mentors, or friends,” she says, “as they were all of these things to me. Dartmouth taught me not to just learn from the books and lectures, but to seek out intelligent individuals committed to their field and learn from them.”

One person she sought out was Ray Bayles, an administrator at a Navajo reservation in Gallup, N.M. A Native American herself, Dillon desperately wanted a summer job on a reservation. Bayles recognized her potential. He offered her challenging assignments, and she also volunteered in the emergency department at Gallup Indian Medical Center.

After handling the rabies calls, Dillon heads off to a meeting. She zips through a maze of cubicles, stopping to say hello to staff members along the way. Tireless and upbeat, Dillon has a knack for infecting people with her can-do attitude.

Her staff shares her enthusiasm for doing whatever it takes to ensure the public’s health and safety. At a meeting earlier that day, Dillon and the department’s nurses met with representatives of a state immunization program eager to run the vaccination clinics in minority communities. But many African-American
can’t sing, can’t dance [but] am a fantastic seamstress.”

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