

**THAT DOESN'T HERT!:** In the two years since the Hitchcock Early Response Team (HERT) was established—with the aim of forestalling “code blue” responses within DHMC—the number of codes per year been reduced by more than half.



THEN & NOW

A reminder of the pace of change, and of timeless truths, from the Spring 1978 issue of this magazine:

A news article titled “Faculty Committee Reports on Study of DMS Program” explained that “the report noted that Dartmouth, with 192 [M.D.] students is the second smallest of 113 U.S. medical schools and that only 18 others have enrollments under 400.”



316

Number of students enrolled in DMS’s M.D. program in 2008

129

Number of U.S. medical schools in 2008

28

Number of those schools with enrollments under 400

19

Number with enrollments smaller than DMS’s

**Memo to supply room: Order more halos**

The halos hovering over their heads are palpable in every phrase of their nomination letters. One is “the most thorough provider I know.” Another is “a true model of team building.” The third “greet[s] thousands of people a day . . . in such a positive and caring way.”

**Point:** These paragons of virtue were the winners of the inaugural James W. Varnum Quality Health Care Awards at DHMC. But the real point—the reason the awards were established by the Trustees—is that the winners are representative of a culture that pervades the entire DHMC organization.

Whether they work in the public eye or behind the scenes, DHMC employees routinely go above and beyond the call of duty. James Varnum, who retired in 2006 after 28 years as president of Mary Hitchcock Hospital, appreciated that as much as anyone. So the quality awards program was created in his name to recognize those whose work embodies a commitment to the highest quality health care.

**Warm:** The first three recipients were Maureen Quigley, clinical program director of bariatric surgery, who was cited by her nominators as a true patient advocate; Tracey Rapp, manager of Central Sterile Reprocessing, who “works well with others throughout the institution”; and Peter Ashton, an information desk patient care representative, whose warm, friendly greeting is the first impression many anxious patients and family mem-

bers have of DHMC. At the same time, Dr. William Boyle, a professor of pediatrics, received the first annual Presidents’ Quality Award, for his career-long commitment to delivering—and teaching—compassionate, family-centered care.

Varnum, a 1962 graduate of Dartmouth College, was the president of Mary Hitchcock from 1978 to 2006, as well as, from 1983 to 2006, of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Alliance, a consortium of 11 health-care organizations in New England. In 2006, he received the American Hospital Association Award of Honor for his outstanding contributions to improving the health status of communities and the nation.

Under Varnum’s leadership, DHMC’s quality improvement efforts included the establishment of the Center for Shared

Decision Making; the creation of a quality-reports website with detailed information on outcomes; the development of a website that posts the charge for many procedures and allows patients to estimate their out-of-pocket cost; and many other regional and national initiatives.

But Varnum was as famous for little gestures as for big ones. He personally presented thousands of service awards to employees over the years, and he would regularly drop in on remote corners

**Now retired, Varnum was as famous for little gestures as for big ones.**

of the institution so that he could find out what was on the minds of workers whose paths would probably never otherwise cross his.

Now, with the creation of the Varnum Awards, the culture of quality improvement and appreciation that he nurtured should continue to thrive. Maybe the supply room should put in a bulk order for those halos.

Laura Stephenson Carter



**Pediatrician Bill Boyle, center, is an exemplar of the culture of caring at DHMC.**

MARK WASHBURN