



Susan Harper (left) with Haaris Beg '16 (center) and partner at Match Day 2016.

## REMEMBERING SUSAN HARPER, MD, FORMER ASSISTANT DEAN FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION

**S**URROUNDED BY FAMILY, SUSAN HARPER MED '84, died on January 29 in Hanover, NH. She was 61 years old. A diagnostic radiologist at the VA Hospital in White River Junction, VT, Harper was also assistant dean for medical education and residency advisor at Geisel School of Medicine until 2018. For nearly 30 years she guided medical students through an often-stressful process of moving from medical school to residency.

Beloved by students, colleagues, and alumni—in her role as residency advisor, it is widely acknowledged that Harper was pivotal in helping medical students focus their career and where they wanted to match. She counseled them on their residency decisions, urging them to consider more than the professional aspects of a program. Honest about their chances, yet always positive, she was adept at finding people's strengths both for the resident match and for alumni seeking her advice for career change.

Longtime faculty member Joseph O'Donnell, MD, emeritus professor of medicine and of psychiatry, says as a medical student, Harper was “typical of those we

admit—kind and compassionate, she embodied the Dartmouth ethos.

“At the VA, she had a reputation as an incredible diagnostic radiologist and a great teacher. She always made herself available to clinicians with difficult cases, and she ran conferences for the medical team—her radiology conferences were legendary,” O'Donnell recalls.

“I had the unique opportunity to have Susan as my advisor when I was a Geisel student and then as an office mate when I became an associate dean,” says John F. Dick III MED '03, interim senior associate dean for medical education and associate dean for clinical education. “Her quality of work and caring for each individual

student as a whole person was remarkable. She made sure that her students thought as much about their professional careers as their personal and family lives.

“Despite her tireless efforts on behalf of students, Susan eschewed formal recognition—as she preferred, the majority of her work was behind the scenes fielding innumerable calls from her students at all hours.”

Harper viewed fielding calls from anxious medical students a normal part of her job, one she happily embraced. That commitment was so deep it influenced those around her—particularly her husband and three daughters, who often joked they too could counsel anxious students.

“Susan showed us how to balance work and life,” Dick adds. “She adored her daughters and made clear efforts to spend meaningful time with her family despite the never-ending pressures of her work. When I first returned to Geisel, Susan was leading the Ford Sayre Nordic program and convinced me to help coach my daughter's group despite my hectic work schedule. I'm grateful to have had such a wonderful role model.”

Geisel registrar Mikki Jaeger, who worked with Harper for many years, recalls her incredible energy, love of her family, and dedicated advocacy for medical students. “She wanted to help them in any way she could. She was kind to everyone and fun to work with. I miss her.”

The New England Roentgen Ray Society, America's oldest regional radiology society, of which Harper was a member, named a lecture in her honor. In 2017, Harper was inducted into Geisel's Academy of Master Educators—distinguished faculty nominated by their peers for excellence in teaching and mentoring.

Roshini Pinto-Powell, MD, an associate professor of medicine and of medical education, says, Harper believed in the power of a Dartmouth education, “and was confident that those outside the institution felt the same way. Our students saw this too—they felt that she believed in them and their dreams.

“Though we feel her loss, we will focus on what was special about her—caring, dedication, and thoughtfulness is her legacy and something we will carry with us in her honor and for our students.”

SUSAN GREEN