

FROM THE DEAN

An innovative and compelling new component of our curriculum for first- and second-year medical students, the Family Centered Experience (“Into the Home, Into the Heart,” page 24) pairs students with volunteer patients and their families from the local community. The program reinforces the underlying tenet of medical education today: the patient exists in a social context, a context critical to understanding illness and delivering effective health care.

In a wonderfully generous gesture, patients and their families open their homes and lives to our students for two-year periods, providing students with firsthand insight into how factors like beliefs, culture, gender, lifestyle and socioeconomic status affect understandings of disease and its remedies.

Within this intersection of education and personal experience, students interview patients in their own surroundings about their medical experiences and even accompany them on medical appointments. Students witness the often rushed, sometimes inadequate communication between patient and physician. They encounter the difficulties patients experience in getting to their appointments: transportation and child care arrangements, taking time off work. They see the effects of health insurance, and how important and meaningful the support of family and friends can be. These physicians-to-be come to understand how chronic conditions and serious illnesses impact patients and those close to them, and how patients navigate the complex maze of clinics, medical tests and other health care procedures.

Social contexts can vary tremendously from patient to patient, and variations in these contexts can influence health and health care. Back in the classroom, students share stories of their unique experiences, stories which enrich and broaden their perspectives.

For those volunteers who welcome students openly into their lives, we at the Medical School feel a great deal of gratitude and good fortune. The Family Centered Experience is one of those creative innovations that bring the Michigan difference solidly to bear on medical education at this university.

Sincerely,



Allen S. Lichter (M.D. 1972)
Dean, U-M Medical School
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Photo: Martin Voort



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