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What Makes A Surgeon of Choice: Dr. John Maxwell

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What Makes A Surgeon of Choice: Dr. John Maxwell

Assistant Professor Pinckney Johnstone (John) Maxwell IV, MD, is a colorectal surgeon who strikes the delicate balance of saving lives, winning his patients' trust, advising students, and expanding Jefferson's community presence. In addition to performing surgery and seeing patients, Dr. Maxwell is also actively involved as faculty advisor to the Gibbon Surgical Society, comprised of hundreds of aspiring medical students at Jefferson (see "About the Surgeon" at right).

"People did the same for me in my training," says Dr. Maxwell, "and I feel it's my responsibility to give back as much as I can." A South Carolina native, Dr. Maxwell was fellowship-trained at Jefferson; he earned his medical degree from the Medical University of South Carolina and completed his residency at Louisiana State University in New Orleans. His daughter was born two days before Hurricane Katrina, and he spent the next two years working in the heart of "Cajun country" in Lafayette, Louisiana.

"That's where I began to see the subtle differences in caring for patients in a community setting as opposed to a large urban center," says Dr. Maxwell. He is now helping expand the Jefferson colorectal surgery practice to Methodist Hospital, a community-based hospital in South Philadelphia. He spends a day there each week in the OR and on endoscopic cases, and trains medical students on the Methodist rotation. For another weekly half-day, Dr. Maxwell offers prophylactic colorectal care in an office setting at St. Agnes Medical Center, also on South Broad Street.

Dr. Maxwell knows only too well that colorectal surgery can be a matter of life and death. Gene Benko, 72, came to Jefferson in an ambulance from Toms River, NJ, in September 2009 with a massive lower GI bleed. "I was in such critical condition that a priest came twice to read me my last rights," recalls Mr. Benko. He interviewed three medical teams when he arrived at Jefferson before choosing Dr. Maxwell, "because he was young, and energetic," Mr. Benko says.

Ultimately Dr. Maxwell needed to perform a laparoscopic total abdominal colectomy. “He was there when I woke up,” says Mr. Benko “with the good (and bad) news” that he had been able to stop the bleeding and save Mr. Benko’s life, but removing the entire colon required an ileostomy—a procedure that brings the intestine to the surface of the abdomen, to emit intestinal waste. “A small price to pay to be alive,” says Mr. Benko.

Three months later Dr. Maxwell performed another surgery to close and reattach the intestine. Despite some complications, which required a third procedure, Mr. Benko is extremely grateful for the care he received. “I chose the right surgeon,” he says. “Dr. Maxwell is extremely conscientious. I know I’m in good hands, and I’m determined to get myself better with his help.” While Mr. Benko sees an internist and other specialists closer to his home near Toms River, he says he will always make the trip to Philadelphia to see his surgeon of choice.

Read more about Gene Benko’s story at <http://www.jeffersonhospital.org/genebenko>

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With Dr. Maxwell's help, Gene Benko of Toms River, NJ, has come a long way since he arrived at Jefferson with a gastrointestinal hemorrhage in September 2009.

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About the Surgeon



Officers of the Gibbon Surgical Society stand in front of the portrait of John H. Gibbon Jr., MD hanging in 620 Curtis. Pictured are Jordan Bloom, President; Rachel Choron, Vice President; Fiona Chory, Technical Skills Coordinator; and Patrick Hartendorp, Education Coordinator.

I know so many students who speak highly of Dr. Maxwell. We are fortunate to have him serve as the faculty advisor to our society. The students on his service love him. He goes out of his way to bring students into a surgical case and makes sure that every student feels that his or her involvement matters to the team. He offers a lot of positive reinforcement and helps to create incredible opportunities for the many Jefferson students considering a surgical career.

At our first Gibbon Society meeting of the year, he gave out his cell phone number to a handful of newly elected students he'd just met, inviting us to contact him any time. As we plan the year's activities, he's always available—even on weekends—to answer questions or offer advice. Because he is so generous with his time and expertise, the students benefit tremendously from direct access to a surgeon of his caliber.

—Jordan Bloom, JMC Class of 2011

The Gibbon Surgical Society promotes surgery to medical students on campus through lectures and events. John H. Gibbon Jr., MD, Jefferson professor and chairman of surgery (1956-1967), is renowned in medical history as the inventor of the heart-lung machine, which made possible the world's first successful open-heart operation at Jefferson in 1953. Dr. Gibbon focused international attention on Jefferson by ushering in a new era of cardiac surgery.

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