From the OR to the Principal’s Office: Video Assisted Thorascopic Surgery Offers Faster Recovery

Until this year, Principal Eileen Weissman had missed only a handful of days in her six years at Philadelphia’s Kensington International Business High School. That changed this past January when she underwent a lobectomy procedure (removal of the upper lobe of her right lung) that also confirmed she had lung cancer. Thanks to the minimally invasive nature of the procedure—a Video Assisted Thorascopic Surgery (VATS), performed by Nathaniel R. Evans III, MD, Director of the Jefferson Minimally Invasive Thoracic Surgery Program—she was back with her students within two weeks of surgery.

A Brooklyn native, Ms. Weissman had developed a cough last July and was diagnosed first with bronchitis and then with pneumonia. Six weeks later an x-ray revealed that her chest was still not clear. In December, she was referred to Jefferson for a PET CT scan and ultimately to the Thoracic Surgery Program.

Dr. Evans explains that, in 2010, Jefferson performed 85 percent of thoracic procedures using VATS, largely to treat early stage lung cancer—rates that are nearly four times higher than the national average. “Given the sophistication and complexity of the procedure, experience is crucial in performing a VATS lobectomy,” explains Dr. Evans. “At Jefferson we have successfully provided the procedure to nearly 200 patients of various ages. Most importantly, the oncologic outcomes of these procedures are at least equivalent to those of patients who had the more traditional thoracotomy.”

Assistant Professor Scott Cowan, MD (a graduate of the Jefferson Medical College and Jefferson residency program), explains, “Much like laparoscopic surgery, VATS requires only three small incisions in the chest. Benefits to the patient include a decrease in early and late postoperative pain, less of an impact on breathing and a shorter hospital stay. Our average hospital stay after VATS lobectomy is less than half the national average. Many patients go home the day after surgery.” Within one or two weeks of surgery, a patient like Ms. Weissman is on her way to the next step in her treatment plan, with radiation, or in her case, chemotherapy.

“I stay current with the work I do and I wanted a surgeon who was on the leading edge. My husband and I asked a million questions, and Dr. Evans answered all of them. From the beginning I was impressed by how he exudes confidence. Having a surgeon of that caliber in your corner makes the process somewhat easier.”

For more information about the Thoracic Surgery Program visit: www.jeffersonhospital.org/thoracicsurgery

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Creating Second Chances for All Ages: The Live Donor Liver Transplant Program

Jefferson surgeons recently performed their 5th adult live donor liver transplant, which allows a person to donate a portion of his or her healthy liver to a patient with advanced liver disease. The Jefferson Live Donor Liver Transplant (LDLT) Program is one of only three adult-to-adult live donor liver transplant centers in the Delaware Valley designated by the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). A new cooperative arrangement with Nemours/Alfred I. DuPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington means that Jefferson patients of all ages can benefit from the region’s finest expertise with this procedure.

About half of the liver transplants performed on children at Nemours involve live donors

There have been strong ties between Jefferson and Nemours since the 1990s. Stephen Dunn, MD, FACS, Chief of Pediatric Solid Organ Transplantation at Nemours, explains that Nemours provides pediatric education for Jefferson medical students and serves as a clinical site for residents. Until last year, Dr. Dunn performed every pediatric solid-organ transplant himself. The newly formed team benefits from the expertise of four additional surgeons at Jefferson, led by Cataldo Doria, MD, PhD, FACS, the Nicoletti Family Professor of Transplant Surgery and Director of Transplantation and Warren Maley, MD, Director of the Live Donor Liver Transplant Program.
Beekley's Combat Experience Informs Research and Protocols at Home and Abroad

Associate Professor Alec Beekley, MD, joined the Division of Acute Care Surgery in July 2010. As both a trauma surgeon and a bariatric surgeon, he will now apply the experience he gained during multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, where he served as Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Medical Corps and was awarded a Bronze Star.

The challenge was to collect meaningful clinical data for every case, given how quickly soldiers were being treated.

Dr. Beekley completed his residency at Madigan Army Medical Center in Ft. Lewis, Washington. From November 2002 through March 2003, he served as staff surgeon for the 102nd Forward Surgical Team stationed in Afghanistan. In April 2004 he deployed with the 912th Forward Surgical Team to Al Mussayib, Iraq, and then volunteered to stay another six months at the 31st Combat Support Hospital (CSH) in Baghdad when the insurgency was growing. During Operation Phantom Fury (November and December 2004) he experienced one of the war's highest monthly caseloads: some one thousand casualties, which he and his team treated around the clock.

It was during this first deployment to Iraq that Dr. Beekley witnessed that a significant number of the casualties were arriving to the hospital trauma bay not having been treated with tourniquets. He believed that, in some cases, tourniquets would have saved lives. This experience made Dr. Beekley an expert on tourniquet use in injury to the extremities, and he created one of the war's first datasets on tourniquet use which has since been cited in dozens of publications reexamining the protocol for tourniquet use in combat triage.

Dr. Beekley also helped develop a trauma database and registry for the joint theater. "There were many 'grass-roots' researchers collecting data as casualties were coming in," Dr. Beekley explains. "In most cases, these researchers were interested in a specific topic, such as vascular injuries. The challenge was to collect meaningful clinical data for every case, given how quickly soldiers were being treated."

Based upon Dr. Beekley's findings, Colonel John Holcomb, who headed the Army's Institute for Surgical Research, recommended to the Surgeon General that the Army provide some 400,000 modular tourniquets that soldiers could carry in an individual first aid kit (IFAK).

During the troop surge in 2007, Dr. Beekley was again deployed to Iraq as Director of the Deployed Combat Casualty Research Team. There he continued to direct research in multiple areas of combat casualty care including the use of fresh whole blood (rather than stored platelets and plasma) in resuscitation. He recalls distinctly the dramatic effect of fresh whole blood on a soldier in critical condition, who was quickly stabilized when he was transfused with 22 units donated by his fellow soldiers. This and similar observations by others at the 31st CSH prompted a reexamination of the entire blood transfusion protocol, which historically called for fresh whole blood infusions only once supplies of stored platelets and plasma had been exhausted.

Dr. Beekley is honored to have played a role in these areas of surgical research. "I think of medical research as a process," he says. "Everyone can't publish the breakthrough findings, but every little piece contributes to the overall advancement of knowledge."

The Department of Surgery is grateful to benefit from Dr. Beekley's unique and valuable experience gained during his service to our nation.
Making a Difference
Now and Down the Road: The Howell Professorship in Pancreatic Cancer Research

Briley W. Howell and his wife Janice have lived all over the world, thanks to his 27-year career as an Infantry Officer in the U.S. Army, rising to the rank of Infantry Colonel. This meant service during the Vietnam War, as well as posts in Belgium, Germany, and throughout the U.S. Since Mr. Howell retired in 1993, the couple has become committed to another fight: the war against pancreatic cancer.

Mr. Howell has generously supported Jefferson ever since his trusted surgeon assumed the helm of the Department of Surgery in 2005. Charles J. Yeo, MD, the Samuel D. Gross Professor and Chair of Surgery, performed Mr. Howell’s Whipple procedure at Johns Hopkins Hospital in 2003. Mr. Howell felt extremely fortunate that the pancreatic tumor was not malignant, which meant he would likely lead a long, productive life. Since that time, the Howells have been following the Jefferson research team led by Jonathan Brody, PhD, whom Dr. Yeo recruited from Johns Hopkins, and have been duly impressed by the aggressive and promising nature of his work.

“I believe that Dr. Yeo’s team is the best in the country, and if this research continues, it will improve early detection methods and increase survival rates,” says Mr. Howell. To make a gift with a lasting impact, in 2010 the Howells made a provision in their will to establish the Janice P. and Briley W. Howell Professorship in Pancreatic Cancer Research. “Endowed professorships are vital to our ability to recruit and retain distinguished faculty members,” says Dr. Yeo, “The sustained support of such a gift allows us to remain focused on our goals in the laboratory and with our patients.”

Since most patients with pancreatic cancer are given a prognosis of a mere six months to live, the Howells are eager to support Jefferson’s research efforts. “I was fortunate that, thanks to Dr. Yeo’s care, I was able to go on with my life as planned,” says Mr. Howell, “and this is a truly wonderful gift. Anything we can do to share that gift with others is of great importance to us.”

Making a planned gift is an excellent way to support Jefferson while obtaining long-term financial benefits for you and your family. The most common form of a planned gift is a simple bequest through a will. Bequests of cash, securities, real property or other assets to Jefferson entitle one’s estate to a charitable deduction that can reduce or eliminate estate tax liability. In addition to bequests, individuals can support Jefferson through the creation of life income gifts, such as charitable trusts and annuities. Life income gifts serve a dual purpose: They provide philanthropic support for Jefferson while also providing both a charitable income tax deduction and an income stream to you and/or your loved ones. These gift vehicles can provide income benefits comparable to—or in some cases exceeding—those that might be earned in non-charitable giving vehicles. Many donors establish life income gifts with assets that are producing a very small amount of income, such as cash or appreciated stocks that do not earn dividends.

For more information about creative giving, please contact Lara Goldstein at 215-955-8797 or lara.goldstein@jefferson.edu.

The Howells with their “kids,” in front of their waterfront home in Poquoson, Virginia. Both are Yellow Naped Amazons: Nikki, 21, and Justin, 26 (on Mr. Howell’s shoulder).

Albert J. Guerraty, MD, FACS, has joined the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. His expertise lies in the areas of routine cardiac surgery, ventricular assist devices (VAD) and heart transplantation. He will provide care at both at Jefferson University Hospital and Albert Einstein Medical Center.

Scott W. Cowan, MD, (JMC Class of ’97) has joined the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Dr. Cowan joins us from the University of Pennsylvania – Presbyterian Medical Center, where he was a faculty member for four years. He will provide care at both at Jefferson University Hospital and Methodist Hospital.

Harrison Pitcher, MD, has joined the Division of Cardiothoracic Surgery. Dr. Pitcher recently completed a clinical fellowship in Surgical Cardiac Care at Christiana Health Care. At Jefferson he will be focusing his attention on the Surgical Cardiac Care Unit.

Drs. John Kairys and Michael Weinstein have been elected to Alpha Omega Alpha, a national medical honor society. The Jefferson Chapter was founded in 1903 and strives to foster excellence in medicine through sponsoring ongoing educational and service projects at Jefferson and in the community.

Jonathan Brody, PhD, Director of the Division of Surgical Research, was the keynote speaker at the Pancreatic Cancer Symposium in Washington, DC, on March 19th. The event, hosted by the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network (PanCAN), was attended by hundreds of people who heard presentations by top researchers and clinicians in the country.

Fund A Cure for Pancreatic Cancer, a local advocacy and fundraising group, contributed $15,000 to support research initiatives at Jefferson. The funds were raised at the annual walk/run in Newtown, PA. Save the date to join faculty, staff and friends for the 3rd Annual Run Over Cancer on Saturday, July 2. Visit www.fundacure.com to register.

Find us on Facebook (search for “Surgery at Jefferson”) and follow us on Twitter (twitter.com/jeffsurgery)