

Health Policy Newsletter

Volume 13 Number 1

March, 2000

Article 10

Spotlight on . . .

Richard P. Wenzel, MD, MSc
Chairman, Department of Medicine,
Medical College of Virginia,
Virginia Commonwealth University

"Measuring a High-Quality Department of Medicine"

JMC Department of Medicine Grand Rounds Speaker
November 18, 1999; 8:00-9:00 a.m.
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Kathryn Eagen Ussai, MD*

*Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Copyright ©2000. *Health Policy Newsletter* is a quarterly publication of TJU, JHS and the Office of Health Policy and Clinical Outcomes, 1015 Walnut Street, Suite 115, Philadelphia, PA 19107.

Suggested Citation:

Ussai KE. Spotlight on . . . Richard P. Wenzel, MD, MSc. *Health Policy Newsletter* 2000; 13(1): Article 10. Retrieved [date] from <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/hpn/vol13/iss1/10>.

Spotlight on . . . Richard P. Wenzel, MD, MSc

Chairman, Department of Medicine

Medical College of Virginia

Virginia Commonwealth University

“Measuring a High-Quality Department of Medicine”

JMC Department of Medicine Grand Rounds Speaker

November 18, 1999; 8:00-9:00 a.m.

Thomas Jefferson University Hospital

Richard Wenzel, MD, MSc, Chair of the Department of Medicine at the Medical College of Virginia, presented a medical grand rounds at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital (TJUH) to staff and guests on November 18, 1999. Dr. Wenzel, a 1965 graduate of Jefferson Medical College, completed his internship at Philadelphia General Hospital and his residency, chief residency, and Infectious Disease fellowship at the University of Maryland. His broad experiences include work at the NIH and University of Iowa, where he made significant contributions in the areas of epidemiology and quality assessment.

Dr. Wenzel began his talk with a historical view of medicine, referring to medicine as an art for the last 2000 years, a science for 200 years, and a business for 20 years. He emphasized medicine's place in our culture as "part of a larger social and ethical fabric," referencing in particular the changes occurring within the doctor-patient relationship. As a business, cost containment is a primary goal within medicine. Financial pressure has caused academic medical institutions to function with reduced income. This situation has the potential to threaten quality by making it difficult to subsidize residency education, sustain a large faculty, and provide funds for medical progress.

Dr. Wenzel proposed measuring the quality of a department of medicine, with the hypothesis, "what you measure is what you value," making it essential that each institution determine a mission before any measure of quality can be performed. He focused primarily on assessment of faculty, whose time can be divided into research, clinical duties, education, and administration. Some aspects of research are easy to measure. Productivity can be assessed by the amount of grant money generated, and leadership in the field can be measured by, for instance, number of articles published and number of talks given. Evaluating creativity and innovation in research is more difficult. Quality in clinical practice can be determined by accessibility, which can be measured by the time it takes for an appointment or by the number of appointments canceled by the physician. Additional measures conducted within Dr. Wenzel's own department (his own measurement "portfolio") include attributes such as affability and ability, which cannot be measured quite so easily.

Dr. Wenzel suggested a mentorship program for young faculty and leadership training for senior faculty as one possible means to improve the quality of a department. Such a program underscores the need for a supportive environment within the department. He also addressed the use of financial incentives to encourage improvement, specifically in the areas of clinical practice, research, and teaching. Dr. Wenzel made reference to L.E. Rosenberg's work regarding concern that we are losing the physician-scientist. There is significant pressure for academic

physicians to generate income while performing clinical duties. When questioned about potential ways to avoid this, Dr. Wenzel offered the idea that academic physicians might be divided into researchers and clinicians. How would a researcher then earn an income? This heralds back to the issue of what the institution values.

Dr. Wenzel's final comments referred to change. Today, the price of medical care is what matters to society. For medical care to be healthy, it needs to evolve, but we should not lose sight of what really matters in medicine – what we have been taught.

About the Author

Kathryn Eagen Ussai, MD, is Chief Medical Resident at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.