In the Spotlight

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Injury as a Disease: Jefferson Spearheads Regional Injury Control Research Center

Accidents happen, right? Conventional thinking often regards injuries as chance events, but the field of public health has adopted a different approach: treating injury as a disease that can be studied, managed, and prevented.

Jefferson is at the forefront of this continuing shift. Under the leadership of Stanton Miller, MD, MPH, Jefferson recently secured a grant from the Public Health Fund, an affiliate of the Philadelphia-based Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC). The grant has helped launch the Jefferson Center for Injury Research and Prevention (JCIRP) – one of the nation’s first truly regional Injury Control Research Centers serving Southeastern Pennsylvania and Delaware.

“Jefferson is beautifully suited to make this happen,” Dr. Miller explains. “In addition to being the official medical school for the State of Delaware, we’re a member of the Delaware Health Sciences Alliance (DHSA) together with Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children, Christiana Care Health System and the University of Delaware.” All of those entities are participating in the JCIRP – a single entity with a unified governance structure and a mission to address any type of intentional and unintentional injury in society.

With decades of experience as a general surgeon, Dr. Miller became interested in injury control and prevention about 15 years ago when he began studying public health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

“Injury prevention and control is the public health extension of a trauma surgeon,” he notes. “It’s so representative of this new era of healthcare. No longer can physicians simply treat disease. We’re now being held responsible for the maintenance of health, and surgeons are no exception.”

The JCIRP promotes interdisciplinary research, studying the issue of injury from numerous perspectives. As an example, Dr. Miller cites violence in society: “Certainly, you need to look at this issue from a medical and trauma point of view. But, ultimately, if you want to solve the problem, you need to take a sociological viewpoint and understand the social determinants of health.”

While medical research often occurs under microscopes, for the field of injury prevention and control, society is the “laboratory.” As such, Dr. Miller welcomes diverse collaborators for the JCIRP’s community-based research, which will study not just the acute phase of injury but also the long-term consequences, particularly among vulnerable populations. Post-traumatic stress disorder among veterans and abuse of children are just two potential topics of study.

From September 16 – 19, 2015, the Department of Surgery will host the 89th Annual Meeting of the Halsted Society in Philadelphia. The organization, founded in June 1924, was named after Dr. William Stewart Halsted, the first Professor of Surgery at Johns Hopkins. Today the Halsted Society is a vigorous organization of professional men and women who strive to perpetuate the memory of Dr. Halsted and further the scientific principles and ideals for which he stood.

Jefferson members Drs. Ernest Rosato (2nd from left), Charles Yeo, Stephen Dunn, and Nicholas Cavarocchi, along with initiate member Dr. Jordan Winter (far left), will represent Jefferson during the three-day meeting which includes scientific sessions at the Hyatt at the Bellevue and the Dorrance Hamilton Building on the Jefferson campus.

The local program will kick off with a welcome by Mark Tykocinski, MD, Dean of Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University, followed by over a dozen talks by Department of Surgery faculty members. Highlights of the social program include a lecture and viewing of Thomas Eakins’ famous “The Gross Clinic” painting at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and a dinner at the College of Physicians (site of the Mütter Museum and Samuel D. Gross Library).