



Gold Humanism Honor Society

Richard Sarkin/Emeritus Faculty Chapter established

BY S. A. UNGER



Sandra O. Gold, EdD, co-founder of the Arnold P. Gold Foundation, inducts David H. Hershberger into the Richard Sarkin/Emeritus Faculty Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society.

Photo by Joseph Garcia

During the latter half of the twentieth century, the field of medicine began to focus almost exclusively on the promise of technology and the subsequent need to train “scientific physicians” who would be proficient at fulfilling this promise.

As a result, many high-tech interventions were developed that led to improved treatments. Over time, however, the new technologies became increasingly expensive, which gave rise to the era of managed care with its emphasis on cost containment.

As is well documented, the confluence of these trends—scientific physicians delivering high-tech care in a managed-care market—resulted in a fracturing of the physician-patient relationship. This in turn has provoked unprecedented criticism from patients about the quality of care they receive, as well as unprecedented frustration on the part of physicians about external constraints that limit their ability to provide care in a humanistic way.

In an attempt to recalibrate the patient-physician relationship, physicians today are actively seeking ways to reintroduce humanistic values into the profession of medicine. One way they are doing this is

to integrate the teaching and recognition of these values into the medical education experience, both formally and informally. Adding to this momentum is that fact that agencies overseeing the education and licensure of physicians have identified specific humanistic and professionalism competencies that must be taught and evaluated in a measurable way. Also, the Liaison Committee on Medical Education has established a set of related standards that medical schools must meet in order to be accredited.

An outgrowth of these efforts was the establishment in 2001 of the Gold Humanism Honor Society, which was initiated by The Arnold P. Gold Foundation, whose other signature programs include the White Coat Ceremony and the Student Clinician’s Ceremony.

“The Gold Humanism Honor Society,” as described in foundation literature, “is designed to recognize third-year medical

students who have demonstrated exemplary attitudes and behaviors characteristic of the most humanistic physicians.”

In 2005, the UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences established a Gold Humanism Honor Society Chapter, bringing the total number of chapters around the country to 41.

Named in honor of the late Richard L. Sarkin, MD, a faculty member, pediatrician and esteemed medical educator who died in a plane crash in October 2004, the UB chapter is unique in that it is the only one to date that is sponsored by a school’s Medical Emeritus Faculty Group.

In Sync with Tradition

The inaugural induction ceremony and banquet for The Richard Sarkin/Emeritus Faculty Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society was held on May 2, 2005 at the Buffalo/Niagara Marriott Hotel. It was

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attended by students, faculty, administrators and special guest Sandra O. Gold, EdD, who, along with her husband, Arnold P. Gold, MD, co-founded the Arnold P. Gold Foundation.

The event was the culmination of years of planning by the UB Medical Emeritus Faculty Group with support from the school’s former interim dean Margaret Paroski, MD ’80, and interim senior associate dean for medical education Nancy Nielsen, MD ’76, PhD.

Leonard Katz, MD, a member of the Steering Committee for the Medical Emeritus Faculty Group and a leading proponent of efforts to establish the Gold Humanism Honor Society chapter in Buffalo, says the UB medical school has a long tradition of promoting the values of humanism in medicine and medical education. He points out that in 2003 the school was one of 10 medical schools nationwide selected by the American Medical Association to participate in a new initiative aimed at integrating medical professionalism issues into the medical-school curriculum. The initiative, called Strategies for Teaching and Evaluating Professionalism, or STEP, is being led at UB by Nielsen.

“There’s a tendency in medicine to glorify the past as a perfect time; it wasn’t,” emphasizes Katz, who is a former associate dean at UB and a retired gastroenterologist. “Certainly there have always been wonderful, humanistic doctors, but we come from a tradition of paternalism—‘doctor knows best’, ‘doctor’s orders’—and this played out

strongly in the way we communicated with patients.

“Speaking metaphorically,” he adds, “the distance between the doctor and the patient first took place with the invention of the stethoscope. The doctor used to listen to the patient’s heart by putting his ear directly on the patient’s chest.”

While Katz concurs that technology has played a role in undermining the patient-physician relationship, he emphasizes that there have been other contributing factors. “In the past, we didn’t pay the kind of attention to communication skills we needed to,” he says, “nor did we have the skills or knowledge to do things as well as they could have been done. Today, we are reaching for new, higher levels of communication and humanism. We’re not trying to revive the past; we’re moving forward.”

The Right Time and Place

The idea to begin a Gold Humanism Honor Society Chapter at UB took root two years ago when Katz was attending a national meeting. At the meeting, he talked with Sandra Gold, who told him about the honor society and explained that chapters were being established all around the country.

“When we had this conversation,” Katz recalls, “I said to myself, ‘This feels like the right time for Buffalo to be engaged in this type of effort

Nomination Process and Criteria

Members of the Richard Sarkin/Emeritus Faculty Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society are identified by their classmates and inducted into the society prior to the end of their third year.

Students are informed that nomination criteria include, but are not limited to, classmates who:

—have always demonstrated compassion, empathy and respect for patients, families, staff and classmates.

—have excellent communication and listening skills.

—have shown exceptional dedication in service to their communities.

—are individuals whom the students feel they would like to have work with them in their own practice or at their side in a medical emergency.

—are individuals whom the students feel they would want for a physician themselves or for a loved one.

Each student may nominate up to six of his or her classmates for the society. To do so, they must submit a brief explanation for each of their nominations, describing why they nominated a particular classmate. It is anticipated that, each year, approximately 15 percent of the third-year class will be inducted into the society.



because the values behind the Gold Humanism Honor Society are in sync with other things that are happening at UB.”

In thinking further about establishing a Gold Humanism Honor Society chapter at UB, Katz had an idea that proved unique: Perhaps the chapter could be sponsored by the school’s Medical Emeritus Faculty Group.

When he returned to Buffalo, he took his idea to the group’s next meeting, where it was strongly endorsed by its members.

“Senior and emeritus faculty recognize there are two distinct but essential aspects to medicine that are complementary,” explains Katz. “There is the academic, intellectual and cognitive part of medicine—you need to have bright, knowledgeable and up-to-date students.

“At the same time, as you move into the latter part of your career, you become increasingly aware that this is only one aspect of medicine and that the other is the human dimension—understanding what people in the midst of suffering are experiencing.

“The two aspects are highly complementary,” he says, “and the Medical Emeritus Faculty Group understood this in a real sense.”

After the idea to sponsor the chapter was endorsed by the group, a task force was formed that included Katz, Charles Paganelli, PhD, chair emeritus of the Department of Physiology and Biophysics, Franz Glasauer, MD, professor emeritus of neurosurgery, and Jack Richert, EdD, former associate dean in the school.

Because the task force members knew they could not establish the chapter without the full support of the school’s

administration, Katz and Paganelli then went to see then-Dean Paroski to present the idea to her. Katz recalls that when they explained to her what they would like to do, she said, “I have been waiting for this initiative to be launched at our school and have been thinking about how to get it under way.”

In recalling the dean’s enthusiastic response, Katz says, “Sometimes things fit ‘just right’, and this was what happened. She thought that having the emeritus

school administrators readily agreed that it would be appropriate to honor him by having his name attached to the chapter.”

At the May 2 ceremony, in addition to inducting 21 students, two faculty members also were inducted, surgeon Robert Milch, MD ’68, and pediatrician Bernard Eisenberg. In addition five faculty members who are former recipients of the Tow Humanism in Medicine Award at the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences were inducted (see list, page 33).



Left to right are Leonard Katz, MD, Marcia Sarkin, and Sandra Gold, EdD

group sponsor the chapter was perfect.”

With the approval and encouragement of the school’s administration, the task force set about developing a process for establishing the chapter and for defining nomination criteria, at which time Nielsen became actively involved with the effort.

“Tragically, Richard Sarkin was to be the chair of the local selection committee,” says Katz. “After his death in the plane crash last October, members of the Medical Emeritus Faculty Group and

“The Gold Humanism Honor Society encourages that up to two faculty a year be inducted, along with students,” explains Katz. Faculty nominations were made by emeritus faculty and the school’s clinical chairs. In the years ahead, several fourth-year students previously inducted into the honor society will join the selection committee.

Once a student is inducted into the Gold Humanism Honor Society, the recognition is included in her or his

Class of 2006 Inductees

Jennifer M. Coseo	Sergio Hernandez	Lynne A. Learned	Michelle L. Niescierenko	Jasmin S. Roman
Natalie Catherine Cushman	David H. Hershberger	Katie Marie Love	Olufunmilayo Odunuga	Kirk Anthony Scirto
Colin Kenneth Dauria	Lindsay Judette Hoelscher	Matthew D. Mack	Jordana Phillips	George M. Watson
Tonya M. Dunlap	Anita M. Hwang	Celines Morales-Ribeiro	Troy A. Pittman	Patrick P. Youssef
Thomas Martin Forsberg	Jessica C. Karl			

Tow Humanism Awardees

The Gold Foundation also sponsors the annual Leonard Tow Humanism in Medicine Awards for a graduating student and faculty member at nearly 80 of the nation’s medical schools, including UB. The award is presented to the student and faculty member who best demonstrate the foundation’s ideals of outstanding compassion in the delivery of care, respect for patients, their families, and health-care colleagues, as well as demonstrated clinical excellence.

The following five faculty members, former winners of the Tow Humanism in Medicine Award at UB, also were inducted into the Richard Sarkin/Emeritus Faculty Chapter of the Gold Humanism Honor Society:

- Jack Coyne, MD ’85, Department of Pediatrics
- Toni Ferrario, MD, Department of Surgery
- Chester Fox, MD, Department of Family Medicine
- David Holmes, MD, Department of Pediatrics
- Margaret McAloon, MD, Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics

Dean’s Letter and is noted at the school’s graduation ceremony.

“The Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society recognizes a student’s academic achievement, while the Gold Humanism Honor Society will honor his or her humanistic achievements,” says Katz. “The two fit together beautifully.” **BP**

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