



DUCCS Happy Hour

The bulletin of the Duke University Cooperative Cardiovascular Society

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Remembering Dr. Galen Wagner

By Douglas Schocken, M.D., DUCCS Faculty Liaison

We are tremendously saddened by the loss of Dr. Galen Wagner, founder of DUCCS and mentor to so many.

Galen Wagner was a Duke institution for over fifty years. When asked about his legacy, Dr. Wagner replied, “I want people to continue to feel the magic of what makes the Duke experience so special.”

Vintage Galen. Never about Galen. Always about the students, no matter their rank or station or locale. For Galen, his own gifts for bringing out the best in people’s potential marked his entire career.

A native son of central Pennsylvania, Galen came to Duke in 1957 and never left. His odyssey at Duke led through undergraduate school, medical school and his postgraduate training as a resident under Eugene Stead, M.D. After his cardiology training, Galen’s early faculty positions included directorship of the newly created Duke CCU and his seminal involvement with MIRU (Myocardial Infarction Research Unit) and the creation of the Duke DataBank. Galen always has been at the leading edge of Duke’s progress. He was one of the first of the AHEC outreach attendings, spending several decades travelling to Cabarrus County and teaching many staff members there. He was an early mentor for Dr. Rob Califf long before the now FDA Commissioner had created the DCRI.

Galen was at the center of whatever occurred to shape the Division of Cardiovascular Disease through its formative years, especially in the process of training young people. Whether high school students, undergraduates, medical students, graduate students, residents and fellows, junior and senior faculty and anyone else with a past or a future, Galen Wagner was mentor, guide, guru and sometimes spur under the saddle to stimulate more than just creative juices.

Following the advice of his own mentor, Dr. Stead, Galen was the force behind many national and international projects and groups, fostering a true “university without walls.” Whether through the Sarnoff Society, Stead Scholars, Greenfield Scholars, Computers in Cardiology or DUCCS, Galen led from the front to make those groups successful and a source of pride for Duke. The DUCCS group in particular has engaged many former Duke Cardiology trainees (and others) in clinical research and other academic interests throughout the country and beyond.



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Galen's mentoring extended to Europe, where he became an advisor to many graduate students and medical students from Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands as well as other countries. With international collaborators, Galen led summer research workshops for the past decade throughout eastern Europe, creating new friendships and ties to new investigative groups.



Dr. Galen Wagner
Watercolor by Chris Wagner

At each of his stops in his Duke journey, Galen's investigative efforts were marked by several characteristics, chief of which has been the excitement generated by helping people learn how to ask questions. They might be questions about a patient, an ECG, a physiological process or some metaphysical enigma. Beyond that, Galen wove a career around helping individuals ask questions of themselves. Where are you going? How are you going to get there? The magic of the Duke experience likely resides in that phenomenon. Galen was the soul of what makes the Duke experience so special. He wanted to perpetuate that kind of process for those whose lives Duke has touched and continue that experience into the future wherever life takes them.

Galen would never consider his legacy to be the hundreds of journal articles, books and book chapters that bear his name. He always treasured the relationships that he built. Galen took the greatest pride in the accomplishments of the many, many students who he guided to success in their own careers and personal lives. That kind of legacy is what he wanted to see carried on through the University that he served and loved for so long.



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Dr. Heitner Returns as Visiting Professor



Dr. John Heitner

DUCCS was pleased to welcome Dr. John Heitner to Duke on August 8-9 as the first DUCCS visiting professor of the 2016-2017 academic year.

Dr. Heitner completed his Duke cardiology fellowship in 2004. After Duke, Dr. Heitner moved to New York Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn, where he now serves as the Director of Non-Invasive Imaging, Director of the Cardiology Fellowship Program, and Director of Cardiovascular Research.

Dr. Heitner has been an active DUCCS member since his fellowship and was DUCCS president from 2008 to 2011. He served on the steering committee for TOPCAT and SOLSTICE and has been site PI for a number of studies with heavy Duke and DUCCS involvement, including GUIDE-IT and PROMISE. He is currently a DUCCS board member and the DUCCS champion for the PRIME-HF study.

The centerpiece of Dr. Heitner's visit was his time spent with cardiology fellows. On Monday, he delivered a lunchtime lecture on finances in cardiology that drew an audience of fifteen. He also met with individual fellows to discuss career paths. Later that night, a group of eight fellows joined him for a private discussion about the job search process and insights from his own time at Duke. In the words of fellow Haider Warraich, "Dr. Heitner had a lot of experience working in different hybrid settings, which was extremely valuable. He was very interested in the fellows and dished out great, candid advice."

Besides meeting with current fellows, Dr. Heitner spent time reconnecting with colleagues and mentors from his own time at Duke, rounding on the DHP (Duke Heart Physicians) service, visiting the cardiac MRI lab, and meeting with DUCCS leadership.

We thank Dr. Heitner for his time and look forward to welcoming more DUCCS visiting professors in the coming year.



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Spotlight On... Duke Cardiology Fellow Nishant Sekaran

We're using our Spotlight On... feature to get acquainted with current fellows, longtime DUCCS members, and more.

This month, meet Duke cardiology fellow Nishant Sekaran.



Clinical interests: Non-invasive cardiology, cardiovascular imaging, structural heart disease, and cardiovascular disease prevention

Research interests: Health services research, implementation science, and cardiovascular prevention. My primary research mentors this year are Drs. Pam Douglas, Svati Shah, and Zainab Samad.

I am interested in 1) better tailoring our diagnostic and therapeutic strategies to optimize outcomes for patients at risk for atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, and 2) optimizing the evaluation for patients with progressive mitral valve disease. I will be working with data from PROMISE (diabetes subgroup), CATHGEN (heterozygous familial hypercholesterolemia subgroup), and the Duke Echo Lab Database (mitral valve disease) to achieve these goals.

Something nobody knows about you: I wrote and produced news and features for Michigan Radio while living in Ann Arbor.

A question you hate being asked: Feel free to ask me anything.

The story behind the photo: My wife, Jami, and I love the national parks in southern Utah, and have spent several anniversaries hiking or mountain biking in them. We celebrated one of these occasions by hiking Angel's Landing, which is a long, narrow, winding trail with steep vertical drop offs that overlooks the Virgin River in Zion National Park. I spent a good deal of trail time crawling on all fours wondering why in the world I agreed to this hike, only to look up at my giggling wife pointing to the teenage girls in flip-flops and seniors with walking sticks who were crushing it.