

# *Celebration of Life*

Gene N. Peterson, MD, MHA, PhD

June 21, 1954–November 20, 2015

enter

# Celebration of Life Program

**Wednesday, December 16, 2015 • 4 p.m.**

VCU Health James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin  
Medical Education Center

## **Welcome and Opening**

John F. Duval, Chief Executive Officer, VCU Hospitals

## **Reflections of Colleagues**

Ron R. Clark, MD, Chief Medical Officer,  
Associate Dean of Clinical Activities, VCU Health

Lisa K. Brath, MD, FCCP, Professor of Medicine,  
Medical Director, Respiratory Care Services, and  
Medical Director, Unique Pathogen Unit, VCU Health

Ryan Vega, MD, Liaison for Institutional Housestaff  
Quality and Safety Initiatives, VCU Health

John Butterworth, IV, MD, Chairman,  
Department of Anesthesiology, VCU School of Medicine

Andrew Ishizuka, Medical Student, Duke University,  
PhD Candidate, University of Oxford, Oxford, England

Thomas P. Sakmar, MD, Richard M. & Isabel P. Furlaud Professor  
Laboratory of Chemical Biology & Signal Transduction  
The Rockefeller University, New York, New York

## **Additional Remembrances**

Colleagues and friends are invited to share remembrances

## **Closing and Blessing**

Jason Callahan, Palliative Care Chaplain, Department of Pastoral  
Care, VCU Health

Please join Dr. Peterson's family, friends and colleagues at a reception  
immediately following the program on the first floor lobby in the  
James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Medical Education Center



# VCU School of Medicine

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Medical College of Virginia Health Sciences Division

November 23, 2015

Mrs. Sarah Peterson  
4300 Hanover Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23221

Office of the Dean

McGlothlin Medical Education Center  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Suite 4-100  
1201 East Marshall Street  
Richmond, VA 23298-0565

804-828-9788  
Fax: 804-828-7628  
TDD: 1-800-828-1120  
[www.medschool.vcu.edu](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu)

Dear Sarah:

I am at a loss for words to express my profound sadness at Gene's passing last week. I realize that the void in your family is immense, and hope that you know that is equally so for the School of Medicine and VCU Health. You married quite a remarkable man who transformed our institution with his carefully crafted vision and persistent message that we all must do the right thing to protect our patients, our profession, and national public health. Despite the fact that his illness deprived him of the full opportunity to implement his vision, he started us on a course from which we cannot deviate, because we now know that it is the right thing to do.

The roadmap he prepared is one thing, his personal style another, and it was that which was a powerful force for change. Those of us who heard him articulate his vision knew that it was grounded in deep scholarship, but it was presented in his unassuming way so that the hours of critical thinking about policy and process came across as perfectly intuitive. That made the necessary behavioral changes across the full spectrum of our community, learners, staff, and physicians, an easier task. It is amazing what can be done when you know what you are doing and you have the magnetism that convinces others to be part of a team. Gene exuded competence and had that magnetic force that made the heavy lifts seem effortless. I mourn for what could have been had he been given the full measure, but am eternally grateful for what we were given in the time that he had.

Gene taught us lessons about how to live our professional lives. He also showed us how to face death with dignity and grace. That lesson has touched all that knew him through his illness. He is without doubt the most accepting person I have met in my life. I never saw him flustered or upset. He was simply unflappable. I wanted, actually craved, his equilibrium. I do not know if he ever lost that in private, but in public, and in all of my dealings with him, it was a constant. He did not need to read Osler's "Aequanimitas"; he could have written better himself. No doubt his equanimity made him an exceptional parent.

Sarah, for all that Gene did in such a short time, we are committed to honor his legacy in the School of Medicine and VCU Health. We pledge to carry on based on his good work and hope that you and your children hold dear his accomplishments and, most importantly, the immense pride we all have in having Gene as a colleague, a leader and a friend. My sincerest condolences.

Fondly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Strauss".

Jerome F. Strauss, III, M.D., Ph.D.  
Executive Vice President for Medical Affairs, VCU Health  
Dean, VCU School of Medicine

**VCU****Office of the President**

President's House  
910 West Franklin Street  
P.O. Box 842512  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2512

**804 828-1200 • Fax: 804 828-7532**  
TDD: 1-800-828-1120  
president@vcu.edu

November 24, 2015

Mrs. Sarah Peterson  
4300 Hanover Avenue  
Richmond, Virginia 23221

Dear Sarah:

I was deeply saddened to learn of Gene's death. Please accept our heartfelt condolences for your loss. Losing a loved one is never easy; though losing a spouse is especially difficult.

I hope you will find some comfort in knowing that our thoughts and prayers are with you at this time. Please let me know if there is anything we can do for you, Andrew or Carolyn.

Sincerely,

Michael Rao  
President

*Gene has made an  
indelible mark on VCU that  
will benefit us all forever.*

November 20, 2015

O 804.828.0938  
F 804.828.1657  
TDD: 1.800.828.1120

Dear VCU Health and VCU Communities,

It is with great sadness that we inform you of the passing of our dear friend and colleague, Dr. Gene Peterson, Professor of Quality, Safety, and Service in Resident Education and Chief Safety Officer.


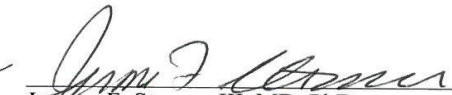
In Dr. Peterson's 2½ years with VCU, he left an indelible mark on all of his colleagues, as well as our patients and the communities we serve. He was truly a visionary leader whose position as a Chief Safety Officer and an Associate Dean was unique in the nation. His work in integrating resident physician training with the quality and safety initiatives of the Hospital and Clinics has been foundational to the future of our educational programs. With the Ebola crisis in West Africa, Dr. Peterson, along with team members from across the organization, immediately rose to the challenge and addressed the needs of the Commonwealth by standing up our Unique Pathogens Unit in record breaking time. His work in engaging resident physicians in improving the safety of our clinical hand-offs of care is leading to the development of models that will serve our learners and patients alike for years to come. Dr. Peterson was a selfless leader who always challenged us to ask, "What is the right thing to do for our patients?"

On a personal note, Dr. Peterson was in every regard an exceptional person. He was a dedicated and loving husband, father, son, mentor and friend. As a professional and scholar, his commitment to advancing the practice of medicine was the stuff of legend. He has touched thousands of lives with his care and his caring spirit; and, he has touched thousands more with his contributions to medicine and clinical education.

Dr. Peterson was a person of great character and even when combating his cancer, he demonstrated amazing strength, faith and grace while always remaining focused on the needs of others. His humanity, humor, humility, and remarkable spirit will continue to inspire us to be the best we can be. Dr. Peterson's legacy at VCU and VCU Health will be one of putting patients and their loved ones at the core of our caring, always striving to do better and always doing what is best for patients.

Please join us in extending our condolences to Dr. Peterson's family and all who knew him. A celebration of his life will be held on the MCV campus in mid-December and more details about the service and how you can honor his memory will be forthcoming. In our grief, we ask that you reflect on a life well lived and the caring spirit that defined Dr. Gene Peterson.

With warmest regards,

  
John F. Duval  
Chief Executive Officer, VCU Hospitals  
Jerome F. Strauss, III, MD, PhD  
Dean, VCU School of Medicine

# A Good Doctor Who Did His Best

## A tribute to Gene N. Peterson, MD, MHA, PhD

Gene N. Peterson, MD, MHA, PhD was a man of many passions. He loved adventure and his natural curiosity led him to have a wide range of interests. Originally from a small town in Wisconsin, Gene came from a large close-knit family and always was happiest when surrounded by his family and friends. He will be remembered for his gifted intellect, strong leadership and love of travel.

In his hometown of Delafield, Wisconsin, Gene grew up working alongside his uncles on the family farm. Gene always claimed that his Uncle Herman, a self-taught man, was the smartest person he ever knew. Being out on the farm gave Gene his appreciation of landscapes and fostered in him a sense of place.

Gene attended Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin where he earned his bachelor of science in physics. While at Lawrence, Gene gained life-long friendships and was mentored by a professor who recognized his talent and encouraged him to continue his educational pursuits. At the end of his four years, Gene had the opportunity to attend the University of Chicago Medical School or earn his PhD through a Marshall Scholarship at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. He ended up deferring medical school for two years to first complete his PhD in Physical Chemistry. While at the University of Leeds, Gene was able to have the opportunity to travel throughout Europe and this is where his love of travel and sense of adventure truly began.

After his two years abroad, Gene returned to the University of Chicago to attend medical school. In Chicago he met Sarah, his wife of 31 years, who was in graduate school for her masters in clinical social work. After graduating he moved west to Seattle, where he completed his anesthesiology residency at the University of Washington. Outside of work Gene and Sarah fell in love with the Pacific Northwest and all it offered, especially skiing, sailing and hiking. Despite the advice of his professors, Gene was determined to take a year off after residency and travel. During the subsequent year, the couple lived and traveled throughout the world.

When Gene and Sarah returned, he was ready to begin his anesthesia career in private practice and his family. He loved being a father to his two children, Andrew and Carolyn. For 30 years, the family lived in Edmonds, Washington, a small town just outside of Seattle. Gene always worked hard—but he rarely missed out on time with his family whether at a swim meet or tennis match. He proudly proclaimed that he was “the number one cheer dad” and he rarely missed a family dinner. He was a cautious father, earning his nickname, “Boat Mom,” by insisting that Andrew and Carolyn wear life vests on family boating outings (even though both were solid swimmers—and even when they were still docked). But he instilled in his children a love for adventure, a strong work ethic and a gift for connecting with people.

During his years in private practice, Gene served on the board for a physician-owned malpractice insurance company where his principal responsibility was to review malpractice claims. It was then that he resolved to devote the balance of his career to making medicine safer. After 14 years in private practice, Gene returned to the University of Washington as a faculty member and a student in the Master's in Health Administration (MHA) program. After he received his MHA, Gene served as the associate medical director for Quality and co-director of the Center for Clinical Excellence at the University of Washington.

After almost a decade at the University of Washington, he came to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) in Richmond, Virginia, for the opportunity to be its first chief quality officer and associate dean of safety. For more than two years, Gene immersed himself in VCU Health's quality and safety initiatives. He took every opportunity to learn from those around him and seized every opportunity to improve the organization. After Gene received his devastating diagnosis, he told those closest to him he was disappointed to not have been able to do more. But for all of his years studying, learning and researching what Gene valued most were the people he met and the world he experienced along the way.

During his long hospitalization, Gene never missed an opportunity to teach and mentor those around him. Despite adjusting to a horrible diagnosis, Gene continued to think about the needs of others. One way he did this was through nightly devotions on the phone with his 95 year-old parents, Dorothy and Harry, to support their involvement with his care. For his last few weeks of life, Gene chose to be at home surrounded by his friends, family and his two loyal chocolate labs, Teak and Burley.

Gene taught those around him how to live, but he also taught them how to die with grace, faith and dignity. His bravery was unwavering and he spoke openly with his family and caregivers about his terminal disease. He told them that in his 61 years he had no regrets. Sadness, yes. He was looking forward to weddings and grandchildren, attending law school just because it interested him, and of course traveling with Sarah. More than anything Gene Peterson considered himself lucky. He lived fully, loved completely and learned tirelessly. He never lost sight of his humble beginnings. His gravestone will simply say, "A good doctor who did his best." And all who were lucky enough to know him will be forever grateful.

# Reflections From Colleagues and Mentees

Dr. Gene Peterson: adventurer, explorer, physician, teacher, imagineer, thinker, researcher, friend and colleague. You touched our lives in ways that we are just now realizing.

Because of you, we see the world a little differently. We hear your voice nudging us towards a road less traveled as we ponder new challenges. You have instilled in us greater confidence and permission to fail, as long as we strive valiantly for a worthy cause. Most of all, you have taught us that life is a journey to be embraced with joy and humor.

We will miss you dear friend, but your legacy, your heart, your impact will live on. Because of you, we are a better community. Thank you for your many gifts.

**Deb Zimmermann, RN, DNP, NEA-BC, FAAN, Chief Nursing Officer, Vice President of Patient Care Services, VCU Health**



What makes Gene Peterson special to me is how generous he was with his time, experience and knowledge. He shared ideas and offered advice freely. He believed in the benefits of high quality, evidence-based care. He was passionate about growing residents into leaders and skilled communicators. I admired his genuine concern for patients and teammates alike. I am forever grateful for the confidence Gene placed in me to represent VCU Health as a leader of value transformation among nationally recognized academic medical centers. The opportunities that have opened up for VCU Health and for me personally as a result of this collaboration will advance the delivery of health care and benefit our patients for years to come. I am fortunate to have gained a mentor, a colleague and a friend in Gene. I miss him dearly and will cherish the time I was able to know him and learn from him.

**Paula Spencer, MSHA, PMP, CPHIMS, RAM Care Program Manager, VCU Health**



I have had the privilege of calling Gene a colleague and friend since I started as the Director of the Langston Center for Quality, Safety and Innovation in August 2014.

As Chief Safety Officer and Associate Dean for Patient Safety and Quality Care, Gene was my partner in the health system. He interviewed me in May 2014 and we immediately clicked. When I started in my job, he reached out to make sure we would have regular meetings – in fact he came with flowers on my first day. We met twice a month for Friday lunches. We had great discussions about quality and safety but also about life and death in general. I will miss our talks and his gentle smile.

**Marianne Baernholdt, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN, Director, Langston Center for Quality, Safety and Innovation, Nursing Alumni Endowed Distinguished Professor, VCU School of Nursing**



I read the article about Gene Peterson in The Spirit – wonderful! It made me think about what Gene brought to us and why I cared so deeply for him.

I was the Anesthesiology Quality Assurance (QA) Director when Gene arrived at VCU Health. I was hoping for a mentor in QA and someone who would globally address quality and safety issues throughout the hospital. I couldn't have asked for anyone better – he was my mentor and muse, a truly exceptional colleague and friend.

Gene immediately started asking questions and really LISTENED to the answers. He was never hurried or impatient and would carefully consider what he was hearing, often asking us for more details or information. He took it all in, leading the group to describe a problem and work through their best thoughts to a solution. He would call or email with follow-up questions, throw out ideas and muse about possibilities in a way that brought forth an excellent plan. His leadership was superb, quietly leading others in the Operating Room environment toward better listening and team-oriented thinking.

He GUIDED gently and well, letting us come up with our own solutions. Then he made things happen, having drawn the issues and answers from those who knew and would be an integral part of the implementation plan.

He LEARNED, always. Gene constantly asked about people, processes, history, reasons, downfalls and successes. He wasn't one to be complicated or mince words (a true anesthesiologist) – I can just hear him saying, "well, THAT'S dumb, we need to fix it." And he would fix it – not a band-aid quick patch, but a real systems-focused improvement.

Gene was HAPPY and ENTHUSIASTIC – he loved what he did and that aura shone all around him. He had a little twinkle in his eye (it shows in his formal portrait) that reflected a quick wit and impending grin. A conversation with him was always fun and inspiring.

Gene APPRECIATED people, and said so often. His positive attitude brought people together and made improvements happen. We wanted to do things for him, and do them well. I think of him every time I use a hand foam dispenser in the Operating Room – and they are everywhere, begging to be used, thanks to his vision.

He thought of his new role at VCU Health as a big adventure (like his world travels) – he saw his responsibilities with wonder and endless possibilities. He was making things happen, drawing us closer together and creating a wonderful working environment.

Gene truly appreciated sharing time with his colleagues. He often said, "thank you for being my partner," and he meant it.

So Gene, thank you so much for being our partner. We will miss you.

**Catherine L. Cooper, MD, Associate Professor of Anesthesiology, Director, Transplant Anesthesia, VCU Health**



Our hearts are so very deeply saddened by the physical loss of our colleague and friend. Gene, we miss your vibrant energy, kindness and enormous warmth. Irreplaceable you will remain and we cherish our time knowing you from our very first meeting and dinner at Book-binders. Gene, we have lost a unique friend, but your gift—to us personally—will remain. You are an exceptional colleague in the journey to safer and quality health care for all of us old and young. In a blink of an eye with down to earth vision, clarity and tenaciousness, you united health care professionals for a cultural change. A culture for improving safety every day—from surgery to the little ones—and this will be sustained. You easily broke barriers to safety education to include this vital component for tomorrow's physicians and undergraduates. We personally cherish our time with you and Sarah and the deep impact you have on people every day. Persistent, insightful and genuine to the end to map paths to health for others. We are grateful to call you our dear friend and colleague ever in our hearts unique, journeyer, pathfinder, sharing your life well lived with us.

**Karen D. Hendricks-Muñoz**, MD, MPH, William Tate Graham Professor and Chair Neonatal Medicine, VCU Health

**José L. Muñoz**, MD, Professor of Pediatrics, Medical Director of Performance Improvement, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU



Gene and I both worked at Stevens Hospital in Edmonds, WA for many years and eventually each went our separate ways. Years later, I interviewed for a position at the University of Washington Medical Center. To my surprise, Gene Peterson was one of the interviewers. Of course, Gene's friendly and familiar face immediately put me at ease. I enjoyed working with Gene for five years. What I remember most about Gene was his kindness and his passion for patient care quality and safety. He touched and impacted many lives.

**Leona Starks**, RN, BSN, Clinical Risk Manager, Seattle Cancer Care Alliance



Gene Peterson was a man who cared deeply about the people around him and enjoyed getting to know and connecting with others. Gene told me during his interview that one of his strengths was the ability to synthesize various opinions/perspectives and to develop and communicate a cohesive vision. He certainly did that and more for handoffs among medical teams; this work continues and there are early indications that it will leave a lasting mark on the way providers practice at VCU Health and beyond. Gene was a fantastic mentor; he knew how to help others find their strengths, how to promote their strengths and successes – and boost their confidence – and to connect them with others who could help them build new skills or hone existing ones. Gene was also good at pairing people with complementary skill sets in order to make a project successful and also how two individuals could learn from each other and grow as leaders (e.g., “he has a strong leadership style but is not detail oriented, she has strong skills in project management – let's put them together on this project”).

When Gene gave credit to others, it was clear he genuinely meant it. I frequently heard him say, “Well alls I did was .... XXX did all the hard work,” even when you knew he was the glue that held a project together.

**L. Dale Harvey**, M.S., RN, Fellow of Patient Safety, Director, Performance Improvement, Safety First & Quality Improvement Programs, VCU Health

I did not know Dr. Peterson well. When I met him I was immediately struck by his casual and focused personality. I admired his ability to provide such focused leadership for the Unique Pathogen Unit and for patient safety at an institution as large and complicated as VCU Health. He was a person that encouraged me to speak up and supported my advocacy for children within our health care system. He was a person I wanted to get to know more. He was a gifted person, uniquely suited for his new found role here at VCU Health. He drew his energy from his interactions with others and thoroughly enjoyed his work. He touched my life in a brief but meaningful way. I will miss him and I hope to always carry a part of him with me.

**Mark Marinello, MD, Medical Director, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit and Critical Care, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU**



Dear Colleagues!

Who was Dr. Peterson to me? It is difficult to answer unequivocally, and it is very difficult to write to you because I feel a strong heartache that Dr. Peterson is no longer with us.

In 2014, I had an internship at VCU Health. Under Dr. Peterson's direction, I studied the issue of the control of nosocomial infections in a general hospital. His guidance has allowed me to successfully implement my internship plan by writing a program for infection control for the hospital I am currently employed with. Every day I apply the knowledge gained from VCU Health and my dear mentor, Dr. Peterson. I also fondly remember every Thursday joining him in the operating room where I was able to observe his work as an anesthesiologist – there I gained valuable knowledge and experience as well.

Dr. Peterson was a wonderful physician – his kind heart was open to all of his patients, colleagues and people he met in his life. I often noticed as he helped advise and teach young physicians. I thank God that I met a smart, intelligent, kind and talented man, who became my friend and mentor.

I also want to say that Dr. Peterson loved his family and children. We became acquainted with his wife, Sarah, who also showed me great kindness and warmth. They pleasantly invited me and my husband to visit their home. We talked a lot about our countries and our cultures. I remember they showed us an atlas of the world and we looked up where my country and city was located. For us, this was a sign of friendship and humanity because they knew that we really missed our country and our family. These little things showed what a wonderful and gracious man Dr. Peterson was.

I think everyone who knew him can say he was full of interesting stories and characteristics that formed a large portrait of a very superior man. Each of us will keep in our memory the image of a smart, kind and considerate human being.

I grieve with you, my dear colleagues. The tears and despair make it hard for me to write, but his memory gave me strength to complete this sincere homage to my dear mentor, Dr. Peterson.

**Raushan Karabayeva, MD, PhD, Deputy Director of the Presidential Hospital Astana City, Republic of Kazakhstan**

My longer interactions with Dr. Gene Peterson were always in the setting of a meeting. Even when residents got restless as these meetings went on, he always kept me engaged because of his energy and passion regarding patient safety. You could tell from his body language and in his eyes. Even just meeting him in the hallway, as busy as he was, he would actually stop just to give a genuine “hello.” I find this to be a rare trait these days as he did this with everyone, regardless of their role in the hospital.

**Dr. Brian Le**, Chief Resident, Plastic Surgery, VCU Health



It was evident that Dr. Peterson was a great man when I first met him in the fall of 2013. He came to new employee orientation and he was just as nice as could be. He introduced himself as Gene, and he was interested and engaged in orientation. I had several opportunities to chat with him throughout the day and a half of orientation, and was asking if he had found places around town such as cleaners, restaurants and that kind of thing. I offered to send Dr. Peterson a list of Richmond places, and he was most appreciative. That document is still on my computer. It is titled “Richmond Recommendations for Gene Peterson 2013-10-29” and I will keep it there to remind me of a great human being who we were so fortunate to have had as a member of our VCU Health family.

And to Dr. Peterson’s family, thank you for sharing him with us. It is because of your support of him coming to our health system that we could have the benefit of his wisdom, expertise, leadership and care. I am sorry for your tremendous loss, and wish you peace and many happy memories to comfort you.

**Liza Bruce**, Training Specialist, Training and Development, VCU Health



If the Unique Pathogen Unit (UPU) has been a child of VCU Health, from infancy to now near adulthood over the last year and a half, we have recently endured the loss of its father, Dr. Gene Peterson. You can’t walk these halls and rooms on North 2 without seeing and feeling the obvious impact of his guidance in rearing our practices, our structure, our friendships and true team dynamics. Many of you got to know him well in training with him or standing suddenly deep in conversation on the unit, in awe of how down to earth, motivated to do the right thing in the name of safety, humble and kind Dr. Peterson was. He advocated heavily for the seriousness, transparency, integrity and inter-professional dynamics we call The UPU Team today. We will be forever thankful for his passion and presence!

**Erin Nowlin**, RN, BSN, CEN, CNIII, Clinical Coordinator, Medical Respiratory ICU and Unique Pathogens Unit, VCU Health



Gene was a thoughtful, caring man who was highly capable of getting things done with a quiet, relaxed demeanor. He was a true role model, mentor and a reminder that relaxed people are fully capable of being high achievers. He will be deeply missed.

**Gonzalo Bearman**, MD, MPH, FACP, FSHEA, Richard P. Wenzel Professor of Medicine, Chair, Division of Infectious Diseases, Hospital Epidemiologist

Dr. Peterson was a great friend and a mentor. I will never forget his kindness and his open door policy to any issues related to patient care and career advancement. He was an advocate of anything that is good in human kind: safety was only one facet of his amazing work. He supported young faculty by his hard work, intelligence and good judgment. He led by example and became in a brief period of time, one of the icons of VCU Health, as a leader and supporter of the younger providers. He will always have a special place in my heart. I can only hope I will honor him by trying to emulate some of his character.

**Paula Ferrada, MD, Director of Surgical Critical Care Fellowship, VCU Health**



I had the honor of working with and learning from Dr. Peterson. As another reminder of Dr. Peterson's passion for resident education and desire to involve residents in quality improvement and patient safety initiatives that affect the entire hospital system, I had the privilege of working alongside Dr. Peterson during the development of the first ever multi-disciplinary, resident-driven quality council at VCU Medical Center. Dr. Peterson was a mentor, inspiration and friend. He will be missed. My thoughts and prayers are with Dr. Peterson and his family during this difficult time.

**Justin Ianello, MD, Chair, Inter-disciplinary Quality Council, Internal Medicine Resident, VCU Health**



I first met Gene Peterson when I interviewed him for the Director of Quality and Safety position at VCU Health. We had a delightful and far-ranging conversation about how we might collaborate on initiatives to advance quality and safety in the Health System. We also talked about travel and specifically about Yosemite, topics that would resurface often in our subsequent encounters.

I had looked forward to Gene's arrival here, and when he finally did arrive, I (reflective of my usual approach to the world) wanted to see immediate change in our systems and processes. Gene, though, wanted to spend 6 months taking stock of institutional culture. I was impatient. I questioned whether he would be able to lead us to significant advances in safety. I can only laugh at this looking back, because he was absolutely right in his approach. Taking that initial time to understand the complexities of our institutional culture gave him the opportunity to identify specific achievable goals, to consider the work necessary to achieve those goals, and most importantly to understand which groups had to be part of the planning and implementation process in order to succeed. That he was ultimately able to do this in so many areas, with unflinching good humor, and seemingly without ever offending anyone, is a testament not only to the disciplinary approach to his work but to his character and his generosity as a human being. I knew I liked him at our first meeting, but I came to know over time what a truly remarkable person he was.

As recently as this morning, I had a conversation with a colleague about our institution's recent decision to participate in the American College of Surgeons National Surgical Quality Improvement Project. We have been discussing and wanting this for years, and we were puzzling over how this decision was finally made, when it occurred to both of us simultaneously "Oh, it must have been Gene Peterson." I expect there will be many similar moments in the months and years to come.

**Ellen L. Brock, MD, MPH, Professor, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Medical Director, VCU Health Center for Human Simulation and Patient Safety**

# The "BE" List

(Posted on Gene's bulletin board in Health System Administration)

**Be** accessible; know your housekeepers... without them nothing else happens

**Beware** of simple answers to complex questions

**Be** a good student of other peoples' issues

**Be** focused on value; shun cheap politics... play to a worthy end game

**Be** patient; in health-care, everyone is issued an ax...and the god given right to grind it

**Be** street smart; few decisions play as a cause and effect; always look for secondary/tertiary effects

**Be** transparent

**Be** curious

**Be** in front; lead by example, demonstrate ownership, your people will too

**Be** flexible; know when to get out of the way of your people

**Be** principled, with every decision ask, "What is the right thing to do?"

**VCU**

November 11, 2015

**Office of the President**President's House  
910 W. Franklin Street  
P.O. Box 842512  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2512**804 828-1200 • Fax: 804 828-7532**TDD: 1-800-828-1120  
president@vcu.eduDr. Gene Peterson  
School of Medicine  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Post Office Box 980510  
Richmond, Virginia 23284

Dear Gene:

It is a pleasure to inform you that your appointment to the Professorship for Safety, Quality, and Service in Resident Education was approved, effective November 11, 2015.

In awarding you this endowment, the Board and I, your professional peers and your colleagues at VCU are pleased to recognize your exemplary contributions to teaching, research and public service. We are also confident of your ability to remain highly productive throughout your academic career and of your continued commitment to excellence and ensuring student success.

You are an integral part of our vision to make a difference as a major research university. I am grateful for your commitment to improving the quality of the lives of people throughout the world. Our collective efforts to think deeply, critically, and creatively, and to communicate appropriately profound innovations and findings will improve the human experience.

It is truly an honor to serve VCU with a colleague of your accomplishment and stature. I look forward to the great work that will follow your outstanding achievements and wish you success in every way.

Sincerely,

Michael Rao  
President

copies: Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Gail Hackett  
Associate Vice President David Sarrett  
School of Medicine Dean Jerome F. Strauss III, M.D., Ph. D.,  
Committee on Endowed Chairs and Professorships Chair, Professor Susan Kornstein  
Committee on Endowed Chairs and Professorships Member, Professor Alpha Fowler  
Committee on Endowed Chairs and Professorships Member, Professor Van Wood

# In Memorium



On Friday, November 20, Gene N. Peterson, MD, MHA, PhD, died peacefully and with dignity at home in Richmond, Virginia, surrounded by his loving family, after a short but aggressive battle with cancer. Gene was the son of Dorothy and Harry R. Peterson and the brother of Duane Peterson (Sharon), all of Delafield, WI, the loving and devoted husband of 31 years to Sarah and father of Andrew (25) and Carolyn (23), all of whom survive him. Gene loved his large family, close friends and his beloved canine companions, Teak and Burley. Gene attended Lawrence University in Appleton, WI (1976) where he graduated summa cum laude and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Physics. Gene was honored to receive one of 30 Marshall Scholarships and earned a PhD in Physical Chemistry (1980) at the University of Leeds, United Kingdom. He graduated from the University of Chicago Medical School (1982), and as a lifelong learner, he received his Master's degree in Health Administration from the University of Washington in Seattle (2004). Gene was a practicing anesthesiologist his entire medical career. He came to VCU Health in 2013 to become its first Chief Safety Officer and Associate Dean for Medical Education, a role that was unique in the nation. Because of his vision and success in integrating resident physician training with the quality and safety initiatives of the medical center, and his development of models of care delivery that will serve patients and learners for years to come, an endowed professorship was established at VCU Health and Gene was appointed the first Professor of Quality, Safety, and Service in Resident Education. What Gene valued most in life were the people he met – and the world that he experienced – along the way. He lived fully, loved completely and learned tirelessly. Per Gene's wishes, his ashes were buried in Wisconsin at the family site and a service of remembrance was held with his parents and family. A memorial service and celebration of his life will be held at VCU Health at the James W. and Frances G. McGlothlin Medical Education Center, 1201 East Marshall on Wednesday, December 16 at 4:00 p.m. with reception to follow (limited valet parking available). A funeral service will be held at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, 6000 Grove Avenue on Monday, December 21 at 4 p.m. A celebration of life with the Peterson's Seattle family and friends will be held in March, 2016 at Holy Rosary Church, 630 7th Ave N, Edmonds, WA 98020, details to follow. The Peterson family is grateful for the care provided by the VCU Health community throughout Gene's treatment. Because of the way they felt cared for during their time of need, the Peterson's would like to help others in a similar way by asking that memorial donations be made to the MCV Foundation for The Rainbow Society, an employee crisis program that assists VCU Health team members in times of need. Donations should be mailed to PO Box 980275 Richmond, VA 23298. For more information, please contact Lauren Moore at (804) 828-3632.



This space is provided for you to share your thoughts and memories.

