VCU School of Medicine
WISDM Professional Achievement Award

Mary Helen Hackney, M.D.

While it's natural for WIDSM to look out for accomplished women to honor with its annual Professional Achievement Award, sometimes it's just as important to look in. This year's award recipient is the president of the WISDM Executive Council, Mary Helen Hackney, MD, a superior medical oncologist specializing in breast cancer, Associate Professor in the Division of Hematology Oncology in the Department of Internal Medicine.

"I have known Dr. Hackney for almost 20 years, since she began her internal medicine training at the VCU Medical Center, said Harry D. Bear, M.D., Ph.D., Chairman, Division of Surgical Oncology. "She is clearly an outstanding role model for physicians generally and oncologists in particular, not only for her outstanding patient care but also for her dedication to teaching, mentorship and clinical research. Her dedication and empathy for her patients are incredible and serve as an example to all of those around her, including myself."

"I got to know Mary Helen on a different level, when she provided care for my mother, said Mary Alice O'Donnell, Ph.D., Associate Dean and Director Graduate Medical Education. "She is a very caring and thoughtful provider. She always took the time to make sure that Mom or the rest of the family had their questions answered."

"I can attest to the fact that patients derive their courage and spirit to fight their illness from the strength and care that they feel from their oncologist," added Kelsey E.S. Salley, M.D., Associate Program Director for Women's Health. "Dr. Hackney's compassionate approach to patient care, leadership abilities and mentoring relationship with so many residents, students and fellows are among the many qualities that make her an ideal role model deserving of this prestigious award. "

In nominating Dr. Hackney for the WISDM award, Brian J Kaplan, M.D., Program Director, General Surgery Residency, commended her skills as an oncologist, educator and mentor: "First and foremost, Dr. Mary Helen Hackney is the consummate oncologist…." In addition, "she is an excellent teacher and it is not unusual that students and residents line up to spend some time with her."

"She is well known for her professionalism, and super care of patients, and is looked on as a role model by both medical students and residents," agreed James P. Neifeld, M.D., Stuart McGuire Professor and Chair, Department of Surgery.

Her students and colleagues agree heartily. "No matter how busy the service or how hectic her schedule, Dr. Hackney always takes the time to teach," added one Hematology/Oncology Fellow. "Speaking with Dr. Hackney was a major reason I came to this university," added Amelia Grover, M.D., Assistant Professor, Surgical Oncology. "It was clear to me after meeting with Dr. Hackney and now working with her that she has a strong interest in the promotion and mentorship of women in medicine."

She also is committed to women's health and to reaching out to the underserved. Her efforts on behalf of Massey Cancer Center's Rural Outreach Program, for which she served as Director, brought high level cancer

care to those who otherwise would have been unable to receive it. She also serves as a mentor for Cumberland School students. Closer to home, she has been a long-time volunteer physician at the CrossOver Clinic serving those in the Richmond area who have no other medical home.

Beyond patient care, outreach and mentorship, Dr. Hackney has a strong background in research and has made more than 100 presentations to medical and lay audiences on issues primarily related to breast cancer. She has been a key collaborator on MCV's Breast Cancer Clinical Trials Program, participated in the National Surgical Adjuvant Breast and Bowel Project, was the local principal investigator for the STAR study of breast cancer prevention, and has played an active role in other research.

Her efforts have not gone unnoticed. She was listed among Richmond's Top Doctors for oncology in 2006, was cited as the Richmond Times Dispatch Doctor for Women's Health, was a recipient of the Kohlenberg Service award from Virginia Breast Cancer Foundation, and received an outstanding faculty award from the house staff of the Department of Internal Medicine among other honors. Yet, "in all the ways I know her, it is her role as an inclusive quiet leader that is the best," Dr. O'Donnell added. "She never draws attention to herself but rather collects everyone along the way and helps them achieve the goal."

"Dr. Hackney's work through WISDM as well as other institutional service has helped to foster professional development of many women in the medical center, myself included," added Cecelia H. Boardman, M.D., Associate Professor, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology. Colleague Laurie Lyckholm, M.D., Associate Professor, Hematology/Oncology and Palliative Medicine concurred: "She has worked tenaciously to elevate women's issues and causes in both the University and the Commonwealth of Virginia. She is a tremendous force in support of women everywhere."

"She serves as an example that is looked up to by women in all aspects of medicine as a compassionate and distinguished clinician who always offers the most up-to-date care in a caring way and as a teacher and mentor who can pass the information on to others who will hopefully be able to follow in her footsteps," summarized and commended Dr. Bear. "We are very fortunate to have her here and I can think of no one more deserving of this honor."