

THE REPORTER

www.vanderbilt.edu/reporter

Vanderbilt Medical Center

Hickson named associate dean for Vanderbilt patient advocacy

March 07, 2003



by Jon Coomer and Paul Govern

Dr. Gerald B. Hickson, professor of Pediatrics, has been named associate dean for Clinical Affairs and director of the Vanderbilt Center for Patient and Professional Advocacy.

The center will create educational programs for faculty, house staff, and medical students around core competencies such as establishing and maintaining rapport with patients and families. The new initiative will also enhance communication with other health care team members and identify ways to involve patients in making health care as safe as possible.

According to Hickson, he and his team will work to identify sources of

dissatisfaction for patients in their medical experiences and work to reduce those things that lead to unsatisfactory care experiences.

"I am excited about Vanderbilt's commitment to thinking critically about how we redesign the nature of our patient care systems by taking advantage of what patients are telling us and providing feedback to the entire patient care team," Hickson said. "It represents commitment to expand our work to identify and reduce sources of patient and family dissatisfaction. The appointment also represents a commitment to education to help faculty and staff understand patients' priorities and the outcomes they want from their encounters with our professionals."

Working with the Patient Complaint Monitoring Committee, Hickson will concentrate on intervention strategies with colleagues and service units throughout the Medical Center.

The new center will also focus on collaboration with Jim Pichert, Ph.D., Dr. Drew Gaffney, Dr. Robert Ossoff, and the risk management staff to conduct root cause analysis of risk management claims to generate process improvement initiatives.

"Making our medical center the safest in the county is one of our major objectives," said Dr. Steven G. Gabbe, dean of the School of Medicine. "Dr. Hickson is nationally recognized for the unique programs he has developed to accomplish this. We look forward to Jerry teaching all of us - faculty, administrators, house staff and students - how to participate in this effort."

Hickson has gained national attention in the area of patient safety and malpractice risk in the past few years. He led a team of VUMC researchers in establishing a basis for closer measurement of physicians' risk for malpractice suits.

The team study, which appeared in the June 12 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association, points the way to interventions that may help lower doctors' risk of suits.

The study suggests that inability to establish rapport with patients is a root cause of increased risk of malpractice suits. In all, the study identifies three factors that together allow new accuracy in the prediction of malpractice suits: unsolicited patient complaints, higher clinical work volumes, and whether the practice is surgical (higher risk for suits) or non-surgical (lower risk for suits).

Over the past 15 years Hickson and various collaborators have studied what motivates patients to bring malpractice suits, which types of patients are most apt to sue and which types of doctors are at greatest risk for suits.

Dr. John Sergent, Chief Medical Officer and senior associate dean for Clinical Affairs, said that with the creation of this new position, "We'll have a focus for education and training of students, house staff, and faculty regarding communication with patients and with each other. We are fortunate to have someone of Dr. Hickson's stature in this role."

[Return to Issue](#)

Also in this issue:

- [Protein may play dual role in preventing disease: VUMC study](#)
- [Bowling for VUMC burn patients](#)
- [Brain Bee Winner](#)
- [Jacobson to lead national society of administrators](#)
- [Lamb Lecture series is next week at VUMC](#)
- [Leading Volunteers](#)
- [Nurses march on Tennessee's Capitol Hill during event](#)
- [Nurses respond to victims of Rhode Island tragedy](#)
- [Pinson elected president of national association](#)
- [Reporter Calendar of Events](#)
- [StarTracker supports disease management and quality improvement](#)
- [Vanderbilt community joins national effort to aid uninsured](#)
- [VUMC geneticists join mentor group](#)
- [VUMC group finds new way to combat ovarian cancer](#)