

White Coat Notes

News from Boston's medical and scientific community

March 15, 2005

Doctor switches allegiances

Dr. Joseph Loscalzo, a world-renowned cardiologist and Boston Medical Center's physician-in-chief will leave his job of eight years to take the same position at Brigham and Women's Hospital across town. Loscalzo, 53, said one reason is that the Harvard Medical School teaching hospital provides a prominent national platform on which to push for policy changes in medicine.

"If you really want to try to influence the course of medicine in the US, the opportunity to do so is a little different at the Brigham than at BMC, mostly because Harvard has greater impact on policy. People pay attention to the Harvard institutions. Other doctors who are thought leaders have spent some time there."

Boston Medical Center, he said, has other strengths, particularly its mission to care for the poor. "It's been wonderfully enriching and very gratifying." Loscalzo said it's important to change jobs at the seven-to-10-year mark. "I don't want there to be a mediocrity of the status quo that takes over."

He will start as the Brigham's new physician-in-chief and chairman of the department of medicine on July 1. He completed his training at the Brigham and has received numerous awards in his career, including the American Heart Association's Distinguished Scientist Award.

LIZ KOWALCZYK

Troubled division gets new chief

Not to leave any unfinished business at Boston Medical Center, Loscalzo announced last week the appointment of a new leader for the hospital's infectious diseases division -- less than two months after the previous chief was removed.

Infectious disease researchers at the Boston University School of Medicine and its affiliated hospital, Boston Medical, were deeply shaken this year by public disclosure that three scientists had fallen ill last year with tularemia while hunting for a vaccine to prevent the bacterial illness. The university demoted the veteran director of the infectious diseases division, Dr. Peter Rice, saying that he allowed safety lapses in the lab where tularemia research was being conducted. Rice subsequently resigned.

Last week, Dr. Paul Skolnik, a veteran AIDS researcher who moved to BU three years ago from Tufts University, was named to replace him.

"What happened to the infectious diseases section and to Dr. Rice and colleagues is quite unique," Loscalzo said Friday. "There's been a lot of section angst and concern about section stability. I think that the best way to solve that is to put a strong leader in place who can lead the section

through this rocky terrain until they get to the straight road."

Skolnik is renowned for his attention to detail and was untouched by the controversy surrounding tularemia research, Loscalzo said, which combined to make him an attractive candidate.

STEPHEN SMITH

McLean Hospital sells acreage

After nine years of planning, McLean Hospital in Belmont completed the sale of about 26 acres of its bucolic 238-acre campus last week, clearing the way for the construction of 121 townhouses by Northland Residential Corp. The \$14.7 million sale is the first of three land development deals the famed Harvard-affiliated hospital is planning to boost revenues, including a 486-unit senior housing project and a research and development building. Officials at McLean said the psychiatric hospital's operations would be unaffected by the development, and the remaining 100 acres of undeveloped land on the campus will be preserved as open space.

SCOTT ALLEN

Joslin reaches into Ohio

Meanwhile, the Joslin Center for Diabetes in Boston continues its aggressive expansion, announcing a new diabetes care partner just outside of Dayton, Ohio. The diabetes center at Southview Hospital, which will include specialists in all aspects of diabetes care, marks the 23d satellite clinic of the Joslin Center in the United States, not counting its international center in Bahrain on the Persian Gulf.

SCOTT ALLEN

The front lines of healthcare reform

Physicians for Social Responsibility and the American Medical Students Association recently pledged to help enact a state constitutional amendment that would guarantee access to affordable healthcare. The measure, which would be presented to voters in 2006, has already received 71,385 petition signatures as well as preliminary legislative approval for a vote.

In other activist news, John McCormack, whose baby daughter, Taylor, died at Children's Hospital in 2000, has agreed to help lobby the Georgia Legislature pass a patients bill of rights modeled on Massachusetts' Taylor Law. Officials at the consumer group, Georgia Watch, said their main goal for this year is to float the idea of allowing patients to testify at disciplinary proceedings about the harm done to them by doctors or other medical staff. Next year, they expect that McCormack, whose lobbying was key to passing the 2004 Massachusetts law, will lend them a hand.

SCOTT ALLEN

And the winners are . . .

Dr. Joseph Murray, the medical pioneer who carried out the first successful organ transplant at what is now Brigham and Women's Hospital 51 years ago, will receive the most prestigious prize given to an American Catholic. In the past, the Laetare Medal, given annually by the University of Notre Dame since 1883, has gone to such luminaries as President John F. Kennedy and death penalty foe Sister Helen Prejean. Murray will receive the award at graduation ceremonies in May.

Dr. William F. Crowley Jr. of Massachusetts General Hospital received the Fred Conrad Koch Medal and \$25,000 honorarium from the Endocrine Society last month for his 34-year career, including research that has helped in the treatment of premature puberty and prostate cancer.

SCOTT ALLEN