A Gentleman Surgeon, Richard V. Worrell, MD

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Dr. Richard Vernon Worrell—the first orthopaedic oncologist in the state—began his invaluable work in New Mexico in 1987. Dr. Worrell served the University of New Mexico (UNM) Department of Orthopaedics & Rehabilitation well, especially by filling voids: he directed the general orthopaedic service at the Veterans Administration (VA) Medical Center for years, provided musculoskeletal oncology care at UNM Hospital, and even came out of retirement when the department lacked sufficient faculty. Throughout his career and retirement, he regularly participated in orthopaedic-related conferences and Grand Rounds. Dr. Worrell was a great mentor to orthopaedic residents and junior faculty while also providing life-saving, compassionate care to many patients. He passed away in October 2014.

Richard was born on June 4, 1931, in Brooklyn, New York, to John Elmer and Elaine Worrell. In the 1960s, he performed his orthopaedic residency at the University at Buffalo in the same state, in addition to serving in the US Army Reserve Medical Corps. After having a private practice for about a year, Dr. Worrell developed an interest in the academic aspect of medicine. In 1968, he became the first chairperson of the Department of Orthopaedics at the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, serving until 1970. During this time, he met his future wife, Audrey M., who was working as a professor of psychiatry. Dr. Worrell filled various roles (including professor, clinical instructor, chief, assistant dean, and director) at several institutions throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

Dr. Worrell’s career continued to be marked with success and recognition. He relocated to Albuquerque (with Mrs. Worrell!) in 1987 and, fortunately for us, completed his academic career here. He became a professor at the UNM orthopaedics department, eventually serving as the vice chairman. To better care for patients, Dr. Worrell focused his efforts on recruiting faculty for the VA and UNM Hospital orthopaedic services. He not only took on the role of chief of the orthopaedic surgery division at the VA, but also directed the orthopaedic oncology services at UNM Cancer Center to provide in-state treatment for patients.

In addition to his clinical work, Dr. Worrell contributed to the academic aspect of medicine. He published two editions of Orthopaedics: Principles of Basic and Clinical Science with Dr. Felix Bronner (providing the first formal curriculum for our orthopaedic residency program) and numerous scholarly articles and lectures. Dr. Worrell was a member of prestigious organizations such as the Orthopaedic Research Society, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, and American Society of Clinical Pathologists, while also an oral examiner for the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery. Dr. Worrell was a gentleman and a fine surgeon. He brought tremendous subspecialty care and expertise in the field of musculoskeletal oncology to New Mexico and the growing clinical mission of the UNM orthopaedics department—created a lasting foundation for future services. The legacy of Dr. Worrell lives on through his children, Phillip and Amy, his loving wife, Audrey, and the countless patients, residents, and friends whom he cared for dearly. I am proud and appreciative to have known him as a friend and partner.

I am honored to nominate Dr. Dale Hookstra for the Golden-Headed Cane Award in light of his impressive clinical, academic, professional and community service accomplishments. Dale joined us in 2007 and serves as Assistant Professor for Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgery and Medical Director of Carrie Tingley Hospital Pediatric Orthopaedics here at UNM. Dale has been an amazing professor and hire.

Dale Hookstra earned his MD at Wayne State and completed an internship and residency at William Beaumont Hospital in Michigan. He fulfilled a second residency in Pediatric Orthopaedics at Toronto’s Hospital for Sick Children. Additionally, he provided 8 years of military service at USAF medical facilities nationwide as Chief of Pediatric Orthopaedics. These years of service were a springboard to an exemplary career.

Dale became Director of the Spinal Deformities Clinic at Detroit’s Henry Ford Hospital where his advocacy for fair, ethical treatment of patients with spinal deformities blossomed. During his 9 years there, he became active in the Scoliosis Research Society (SRS), Pediatric Orthopaedic Society of North America (POSA) and American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOS). He also worked in private practice for 8 years as a Pediatric Orthopaedic Surgeon at Rochester Hills Orthopaedics, where a team approach to comprehensive orthopaedic and spine care is emphasized. He served as president and leader of his group.

Dale then joined the UNM School of Medicine where he has become a committed leader and phenomenally sage advisor to faculty, residents, and medical students. He has a warm personality and is a huge supporter of UNM Orthopaedics in faculty/resident work satisfaction. He also helps me, in my role as chair, recruit and retain extraordinary orthopaedic faculty and residents. During his 7 years at UNM, I have come to rely on Dale’s opinions on department strategy—in general and on specifics. He is a respected didactic lecturer on Pediatric Orthopaedics and contributes to the annual Carrie Tingley Hospital Annual Winter Conference as moderator and presenter. In total, he has mentored and instructed some 40 residents and fellows at UNM.

Dale keeps current on advances in Pediatric Orthopaedics by attending annual meetings and courses offered by POSNA, SRS, and AAOS in addition to other competency-based programs and workshops. He also collaborates on research with publications in the Journal of Pediatric Orthopaedics and The Journal of Trauma and Acute Care Surgery.

In my opinion, Dale is an outstanding candidate for this award which will allow us to recognize his wonderful contributions to UNM, New Mexico, and the orthopaedic care of children statewide. Dale has wonderful habits, but none more important than checking with his partners at day’s end and asking, “Can I help out with any cases or problems before I leave?”

When Dale’s colleagues describe him, words like “practical” and “efficient” are shared. One equates his administrative abilities with “the finesse of a master.” Another praises Dale’s seemingly indefatigable work ethic by noting he is “always ready to pull for the team.”

Indeed, Dale is an inspiration to us all and merits consideration of the Golden-Headed Cane award.