

# A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

## Alumni and faculty offer students career guidance through their own experiences at the Career Advisory Networking Dinner.

**L**eo Urbinelli was attracted by the opportunity to hear about various medical specialties from those who practice them in a casual, no-pressure atmosphere. That and the free dinner.

That's why he was among the 120 medical students who took advantage of the Career Advisory Networking Dinner on January 8. The dinner, co-sponsored by the Medical Alumni Association and the Office of Student Affairs, brought together 40 alumni and faculty representing 22 specialties and subspecialties and 120 students to chat informally over a meal.

The meal was served buffet style, and so was the medicine.



Arthur Vercillo, MD '82, chats with students.

Tables were set up for each specialty with clinicians sitting at the table they represented. Students could come by and visit for as long as they wished.

Over at the surgery table, Urbinelli, a second-year student from Ontario, New York, chatted at length with Arthur Vercillo, MD '82, about his experience as an ENT as well as his perspective on other fields. "He talked candidly about his own and other fields without trying to sway me one way or another," says Urbinelli.

In addition to his views on the specialties, Dr. Vercillo offered Urbinelli plenty of good general advice, from how to improve his chances as a candidate applying for residency ("form good relationships with doctors in your field of interest during your third and fourth-year rotations") to where to apply ("make sure you would be okay living in the area because many people end up practicing where they go for residency").

At the pediatrics table, students got a range of perspectives, from Sean O'Malley, MD '03, who just completed his residency last year, to 88-year-old Fred Roberts, MD '42, a veteran of 60 years of practice.

"The students asked very good questions—about the difficulties getting along with parents, learning to handle the children, and whether, economically, pediatrics is a reasonable field. I thought we presented the advantages of our field rather effectively," says Dr. Roberts.

Over at internal medicine, the four docs present bounced their various views of practicing medicine off one another. "It's a big jigsaw puzzle of experiences and everyone's got their piece to give the whole picture of the specialty," says Mark Erlebacher, MD '79, an internist in private practice in Fayetteville, New York.

Dr. Erlebacher, a seasoned Upstate volunteer, is a



Assistant Dean of Student Affairs Barry Berg, PhD

member of the Alumni Association's Career Advisory Network. The Network provides a link for students to contact a mentor about a specialty or residency program they may want to pursue. "This dinner was an off-shoot of that group," says Vincent Kuss, executive director of the Syracuse Medical Alumni Association. "The event allowed a large number of students, faculty, and alumni to interact in an informal setting. We plan to hold it annually."

While geared for the students, the dinner also provided a venue for Student Affairs to gather information that will enable them to provide more career development support for medical students in the future. "We thought it would be a good idea to get the advisory deans involved with this so that we can provide better information to student when they're interested in different careers," says Barry Berg, PhD, head of the anatomy program and assistant dean for student affairs.

From the clinicians attending, Dr. Berg was able to put together a list of contacts to use for students planning their residencies. "It opened up communication to allow us to act as informed go betweens between the students, the faculty, and the clinicians in private practice," he says.

Clerkship Director Tayloe Loftus, MD, saw the event as a particularly valuable tool for third-year students who are choosing electives and designing their fourth year. "They transition to planning for residency rather than worrying about what clerkships they'll get honors in," she says. "It is a nerve-racking time and hopefully it is helpful to have some input from people who work in the field regularly."

It was for Rachel Garner, a third-year student now at the Clinical Campus in Binghamton, who caught up with professors while gathering information to help



Psychiatrists John Manning, MD '77, and Department Chair Mantosh Dewan, MD, HS '79, share their expertise.

Mentors and students converse during dinner.

her career decision making. "It seemed as though every specialty I have considered over the course of the year was there," she says.

"At times I think I know what I want to do and just when I think I've found it, I change my mind. The physicians were very knowledgeable, friendly, and helpful."

That was the point. The motivation for the physicians who participated was simple—helping their profession, their alma mater, and the next generation.

"I thought back to when I was in medical school and how nice it would have been if we had had a similar bridge to the future," says Dr. Fred Roberts. "That's what I thought we represented—a bridge to the future. This is a lifelong career. You can't take it lightly." ■