2020-2021 Golden Stethoscope Nomination

Nominated for: Demonstrating Leadership

Name of Nominee Dr. Mary Bessesen

Dr. Bessesen has demonstrated excellent leadership throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As the Chief of Infectious Disease at the Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center (RMR VAMC), her leadership through the pandemic has served patients and healthcare workers throughout the VA's Eastern Colorado Health Care System. In addition to this work, she has remained dedicated to educating the next generation of physicians, from medical students to Infectious Disease fellows.

At the beginning of the pandemic, she worked directly with medical student volunteers, who shadowed her as she led the RMR VAMC's Incident Command and Infection Control teams at a time of great uncertainty. I heard from these students that working with Dr. Bessesen was a great experience as she emulated composure and compassion during the stressful times of the early pandemic.

In the past several months, Dr. Bessesen has remained a source of inspiration and information for her colleagues. As an example, a healthcare provider reached out to Dr. Bessesen with questions she received from VA patients regarding myths about COVID-19 vaccines. Dr. Bessesen promptly responded with succinct, accessible, and empathetic answers which dispelled those myths. I'm sure she has done this countless times for other providers and patients!

Prior to the pandemic, I had the honor of working with Dr. Bessesen in ID clinic and rounding on the inpatient ID consult team (as a foundations preceptor in my third year), where she modeled compassionate curiosity in her approach with patients. I always marveled at how she listened to her patients' stories and combined their life experiences with her vast infectious disease knowledge to provide them with plans for diagnosing and treating their complex illnesses. This was especially impressive to me because the patients we saw often came to ID clinic after having seen many other specialists first. Even when she did not have a clear answer to their problems, she made sure patients could tell their stories and were truly heard. She approaches teaching in the same way. Whether in clinic or on the wards, she questions learners to understand their thinking, and then challenges them to think creatively about patients' situations.

As I begin the process of applying to Internal Medicine residency this year, I hope that I can model my career after Dr. Bessesen's leadership. Her attentive and compassionate teaching, patient care, and leadership are all skills I hope to emulate in my training. The impact of Dr. Bessesen's leadership and mentorship extends to so many students, colleagues, and patients, and this award is well-deserved!

Written by: Lauren Heery, Phase 3