



J. Richard Gaintner



BACHRAGH

A native of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Dr. J. Richard (“Dick”) Gaintner received his undergraduate education at Lehigh University and his M.D. degree four years later in 1962 from the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Following residency in medicine at the University Hospitals of Cleveland, he served as Captain in the US Army Medical Corps, first at the Army Hospital in Fort Carson, Colorado, and then as Assistant Chief of Staff at the 85th Evacuation Hospital in Qui Nhon, receiving in 1966 the Army Commendation Medal for “Meritorious Service in the Republic of Vietnam.”

He returned to Hopkins for a year as Fellow in Hematology and then, in 1967, joined the first faculty of the newly-established University of Connecticut School of Medicine. In 1975, he became Vice President for Medical Affairs at New Britain General Hospital. This experience, combining the context of medical practice, its teaching and administration, led to his appointment in 1977 as Associate Dean for Administration at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and subsequently as Vice President and Deputy Director of Johns Hopkins Hospital.

In 1983, Dr. Gaintner moved to Albany Medical Center as President and CEO, and six years later to New England Deaconess Hospital in Boston as its President and CEO, joining the faculty of Harvard Medical School where he rose to Professor of Medicine. Shortly after assuming these responsibilities, while reviewing the history of the New England Deaconess Hospital, Dr. Gaintner came upon a statement by Mary E. Lunn, who was the Superintendent at the founding of the institution in 1896, wherein she envisioned the hospital as a place where “science and kindness unite in combating disease”. Her comment resonated with Dr. Gaintner such that he adopted it as the institution’s mission statement and used it as a guiding principle for the development of the New England Deaconess Hospital under his leadership.

During his seven year tenure as President and CEO of the New England Deaconess Hospital (NEDH) he quickly restored the hospital to fiscal stability while providing the underpinning for a remarkable growth in the clinical and academic programs. Under his leadership the new Clinical Center was conceived, financed and built, giving the NEDH one of the finest inpatient clinical facilities in Boston. With subsequent events, this facility became a major component of the merger with the Beth Israel Hospital (BI). During his tenure he brought together with Deaconess a variety of neighboring hospitals to form Pathway Health Network, to include New England Baptist Hospital, Nashoba Hospital in Ayer, Deaconess-Glover in Needham, and Deaconess-Waltham Hospital.

In the early 1990's it became clear that despite formation of the Pathway Health Network, the Deaconess needed a major partner to continue to grow. His vision and statesmanship played a major role in the merger of the NEDH and BI to form the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, which has subsequently been proven to be one of the most successful true mergers of major academic medical centers in the country.

With the 1996 merger of Deaconess and Beth Israel Hospitals, and the inclusion of Cambridge's Mount Auburn Hospital to the Pathway group, the CareGroup HealthCare System was formed, with Dr. Gaintner becoming President, then the second largest hospital network in New England. A year later, he was recruited as CEO of Shands Healthcare in Gainesville, Florida, bringing more than a modicum of order and forward thrust to a relatively young network that initially confronted him with what was characterized by The Free Library as "...the usual complement of internal divisions and conflicts, reflecting an underlying uncertainty about mission, frustration over the lack of alignment among the system's components, and the natural tendency to try to fix blame rather than confront the fundamental changes underway in health care." This report goes on to characterize the basis of his success at Shands: "Gaintner's mild-mannered complexity reflects both developmentally acquired attributes – blue collar upbringing, undergraduate philosophy major, physician, businessman, insatiable reader – as well as core personality characteristics – inevitable optimist, empathetic listener, pragmatist and conciliator. This constellation of attributes underlies clinical and managerial intuition that blends into an artful style.... Gaintner's approach is characterized by consistent, straightforward messages. His skill is honing in on values and the critical issues upon which complex decisions pivot. He continually returns to the fundamentals, believes in collaboration, meets with everybody (even competitors) and keeps the lines of communication open. He believes that discussion can illuminate common ground, even in the most complicated and contentious relationships."

After four years at Shands, Dr. Gaintner retired, only to be called to Georgetown University as Interim Executive Vice President for Health Services, but was shortly obliged by illness to return home to Gainesville. A beloved second home for many years was in Duxbury, Massachusetts where he maintained a long-standing interest in nearby Plymouth's Jordan Hospital. In 2001 he was invited to join the Jordan Health Systems Board.

Widely recognized as an outstanding member of American academic medicine, Dr. Gaintner had been a member of the Executive Board of the Association of American Medical Colleges and Chair of its Council of Teaching Hospitals, Board member of the American Hospital Association and of the American College of Physician Executives.

Dick Gaintner died of pancreatic cancer on May 25, 2004. He was survived by his wife, Suzanne Butler Gaintner, three daughters, Wendy Holcomb of Tacoma, Washington, Sally G. Hess of Phoenix, Arizona,

and Jenny Gaintner of Freeland, Maryland, and seven grandchildren.

On May 19, 2004, Dr. J. Richard Gaintner was inducted into the Johns Hopkins Society of Scholars, a fitting honor bestowed upon highly selected former Hopkins faculty members who have gained marked distinction in their respective fields.

Respectfully submitted,

Mitchell T. Rabkin, M.D.

Robert C. Moellering, Jr., M.D.

Adolf W. Karchmer, M.D., *Chair*