

## TO MEDIA

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## **LATROBE HOSPITAL FAMILY MEDICINE RESIDENCY PROGRAM CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF TRAINING PRIMARY CARE PROVIDERS**

**LATROBE, PA, August 1, 2024** ... During Dr. John R. Mazero's 30-year tenure as medical director of Latrobe Area Hospital, he had one overarching goal: cultivate a steady replenishment of medical specialists to ensure the hospital could meet the needs of the community in the present and long into the future. Within that goal was a concern: who would provide primary care once the longtime general practitioners hung up their stethoscopes and concluded their careers. Working in concert with one of those GPs, Dr. Joseph Govi, the pair identified a solution: form a partnership with Thomas Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia and begin training family physicians who hopefully would find southwestern Pennsylvania appealing enough to set up practice locally once they

graduated. A three-year family medicine residency program and associated outpatient primary care clinics was initiated in 1974 with Dr. Govi as its first director. And the rest, as they say, is history. The Latrobe Hospital Family Medicine Residency Program, now part of Independence Health System, marks its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this weekend with a celebratory gathering of graduates and teaching faculty.

Since its inception, the program has graduated 257 resident doctors. These family physicians serve communities and health systems across Pennsylvania and across the country, from North Carolina to Colorado, Texas to California, and places in between. Approximately 50 graduates have remained with Independence Health System, including Chief Medical Officer Carol J. Fox, MD, FAAFP, (Class of 1990) or returned to southwestern Pennsylvania following fellowship training in sports medicine, geriatrics and other specialties to establish or join existing practices.

Among the program's notables: Michael Semelka, DO, who has been program director since 2009, is the inaugural Primary Care Department Chair of the new Duquesne University College of Osteopathic Medicine, which accepted its first medical students in July. It is anticipated that Duquesne will serve as a feeder to the Latrobe residency, just as Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine with branches in Erie, Florida and Greensburg (Seton Hill University) has been.

Robert Zimmerman, MD (Class of 1996) serves as president and chief medical officer of Bridges Health Partners, LLC, an integrated network of four independent nonprofit health systems that works to improve the health of populations in western Pennsylvania. The five hospitals of Independence Health System are included in this network.

Latrobe's three-year residency program which has a complement of 24 physicians in training at any one time is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) and now affiliated with both the Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University and the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine. The program is also the recipient of the prestigious DeWitt C. Baldwin, Jr. Sponsoring Institution Award given by the ACGME and Arnold P. Gold Foundation. The award is presented to accredited residency/fellowship programs that are exemplary in fostering a respectful, supportive environment for medical education,

and the delivery of patient care, which leads to the personal and professional development of learners.

Benjamin Mathews, MD (Class of 2011) credits the residency, and Dr. Fox in particular for his success in establishing the first residency program at Doylestown Health with a particular focus on inpatient medicine. “During my time at Latrobe, Dr. Fox was serving as interim program director,” he recalled. “Caring for patients when they were hospitalized was a key component of my experience and we were encouraged to pursue our passion. There was a great deal of autonomy for the on-call residents and I realized how much I loved hospital medicine and education.”

Another hallmark of the Latrobe residency for Dr. Mathews was the direct contact with the attending physicians. By being an unopposed residency, the program offered a breadth of experiences and direct feedback about how best to meet patient needs in a variety of settings – from hospital to skilled care to outpatient clinic. This hands-on education was something Dr. Mathews believed put the program on “a higher plane” and he vowed to replicate in his career.

Following graduation, Dr. Mathews accepted a position as Director of Inpatient Medicine/Academic Hospitalists for the Bryn Mawr Family Medicine Residency Program, part of Main Line Health. Over the next seven years, he would earn two teacher of the year awards.

He was recruited to Doylestown Health in 2018 to build the hospital’s first post-acute care medical service as well starting its first medical residency program in Family Medicine, which welcomed its first class of eight residents in 2023. He currently serves an integral role in post-acute care as a skilled nursing facility physician; inpatient medicine as an academic hospitalist running the teaching service, as well as the program director of a second residency program, the Transitional Year Residency Program, which welcomed its first class of eight resident physicians in 2024.

“I truly enjoy caring for patients and teaching and feel very fortunate I can do both. I owe my success to my experiences in Latrobe, and have endeavored to model what I learned from my incredible attendings during my residency.”

“Each graduate of our program has a unique story to tell of how they have improved the health and well-being of countless lives and advanced the practice of

family medicine,” added Dr. Fox. “From its inception a half-century ago to today, the bar has been set high for program participants. I am proud to be a product of the program, but equally proud of all those who have graduated and gone on to be the trusted foundation for their patients’ health over a lifetime.”

#### **About Independence Health System**

Nationally recognized for quality care, Independence Health System comprise Butler Memorial, Clarion, Frick, Latrobe and Westmoreland Hospitals with a combined bed count of 925. With more than 1,000 physicians and advanced practice providers and 7,300 employees, the System is now the third largest in western Pennsylvania serving a population base of 750,000 in a footprint spanning more than 10 counties.

The System includes tertiary programs that are rated among America’s best for cardiac care and surgery by Healthgrades in its Top 100 and Top 50 designations, and one of only five in Pennsylvania to achieve a five-star rating in cardiac surgery. In similar fashion, the prestigious Society of Thoracic Surgeons (STS) bestowed its top three-star rating. Historically, less than 10 percent of programs within the STS data base achieve this elite standing. The hospitals of Independence Health System also have earned a host of accolades from such prestigious outlets and sources as US News and World Report, Newsweek Magazine, the American College of Radiology, the American College of Cardiology, the American College of Surgeons, the Joint Commission, Leapfrog and the American Heart/Stroke Association.

Locally owned and locally controlled, Independence Health System offers its patients low-cost, high-quality care across the care spectrum in such specialties as cardiology, cardiovascular and thoracic surgery, orthopedics and sports medicine, minimally invasive and robotic surgery, women’s health and obstetrics, emergency medicine, behavioral health and primary care. Its network of outpatient centers sees more than 1.2 million visits annually. The homecare division further supports patients at all stages of life with home health and hospice services.

Independence Health System continues to change the healthcare landscape in western Pennsylvania by meeting patient needs through superb physician expertise, outstanding nursing, the latest in technology and programmatic depth.