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Chairman's Corner

by Arthur Peisner

There are about 150 administrative and clinical volunteers at VIM, more than half of them active at any point in time. They are all extraordinary in their dedication and generosity; we and our patients are extremely grateful for their commitment. Consequently, I always hesitate to single one out for fear of offending the other 149, or even just one of them. But in this case, I am confident that no one will be offended. In fact, they will join me in applauding Dr. Matthew Mandel.

Matt was one of the first to join with a small group of individuals to begin developing the idea of a free health care clinic staffed by volunteers here in the Berkshires. He has served on the Board of Trustees since before the doors opened and presently as its Vice Chairman and Co-Medical Director. His vision and tireless work in recruiting volunteer physicians and other healthcare professionals has led directly to VIM's success in providing free healthcare services to the uninsured and underserved people of this area.

In the past eight years, Matt has recruited 55 volunteer doctors and other clinical providers from among both active and retired professionals. His recruiting efforts have also helped to develop a network of 18 offsite specialists who see VIM patients on a referral basis at no charge in their own offices, and he has been instrumental in obtaining lab and imaging services for our patients at Fairview Hospital and Berkshire Medical Center. But Matt's

contribution is not limited to medical services, he plays a key role in recruiting providers and establishing dental, mental health, optometry, nutrition and acupuncture services, in addition to medical care at VIM.

He is an active participant in the clinic on a daily basis, supporting and facilitating volunteers' work providing care to VIM patients. He tirelessly shares his expertise and experience in the medical profession to develop volunteers as valuable members of a bigger effort. The vibrant, caring and effective community of volunteers that is VIM Berkshires would not exist without Matt's extensive, committed and intelligent work.

In addition to his impact on VIM's clinical services, Matt plays a vital role in raising the nearly \$600,000 per year that it takes to pay for the support staff, supplies, medications and overhead to keep the clinic in operation. As our Vice Chair and a member of our Development Committee, he helps guide our grant writing and fundraising efforts, personally cultivating and soliciting potential donors and funders. As Chair of the Nominating Committee, he takes the lead in seeking out and identifying potential new board members, helping to ensure VIM's vitality and longevity.

In recognition of these efforts, Dr. Mandel has been honored by the Massachusetts Medical Society as its 2012 Senior Volunteer Physician of the Year. We are very proud and fortunate to have him as one of our own.

Medical Corner

by Lynne Shiels, RN, PNP, VIM Clinical Care Coordinator

Refer, Insure and Repeat?

A good deal of my time at VIM is devoted to referring patients to appropriate agencies to secure health insurance. Depending on the circumstances, this process can sometimes be lengthy and require some problem solving to finalize the acceptance.

A patient was referred to VIM by a local hospital's discharge case manager. He had been hospitalized due to a serious cardiac condition. He had been insured through his wife's family plan. When the large retail company she worked for cut back her hours, she was only able to get an individual insurance plan. Having lost health insurance, he was unable to afford the 10 medications he needed. It took months of negotiations for him to recover some insurance coverage. In the meantime, he received excellent cardiology follow-up with VIM's volunteer cardiologist, as well as psychiatric care and

medication support also provided by VIM. This intervention stabilized his condition and kept him from returning to an emergency room, which was his only recourse.

One of the most disheartening parts of my job occurs when a patient whom we have worked so hard to insure loses their coverage, often prior to renewing their plan. Starting over and moving forward again to regain insurance can be confusing



Continued on Page 3

The Many Faces of VIM

Meet Melvyn Feldman, DDS, Volunteer Dentist

by Tricia Bevan



Dr. Mel Feldman, one of 7 dentists in VIM's clinic, believes that it is the formative years that are important to who you are and what you will become. This always smiling, friendly, easy-going man was born in the Bronx about 70 years ago. He attended school in Long Beach, New York. Mel worked summers starting at age 15 at the Malibu Beach Club, in Lido Beach. This was all through his high school and college years. There he came in contact with "so many nationalities – Greeks, Germans, Spaniards, Cubans – and I learned so much about the world from all of them." He enjoyed this kitchen work, so much so, he once thought he might become a chef – he loved preparing salads, and sandwiches, loved chatting with the customers. These days, he looks back on it all fondly, and his ten-year old granddaughter Hannah often begs him to tell her stories about his "Malibu Days". He has written many of them down in story form for her. Like all grandfathers, he is really proud of his two grandchildren who live just a couple hours away.

After graduating High School on Long Island, Mel attended Adelphi University for his undergraduate degree, and it was there he met and married his wife, Jane. They have two children. He then went on to receive his dental degree from the NYU School of Dentistry. During the Vietnam War he was assigned early commissioning, which allowed him to finish his degree on the condition that he complete two years of obligatory military service after graduation. These two years were spent at Bunker Hill Air Force Base, now called Grissom Air Force Base, in Peru, Indiana – not far from Wright Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. With his service days

behind him, Mel returned to NY to work on the Lower East Side in a large dental practice at Delancey and Allen Streets... Once again, he thrived on being thrust into a very diverse neighborhood, the neighborhood of the immigrants, as it is sometimes called. He worked there for two years.

Mel Feldman went into dentistry partly due to the encouragement and fine example of the neighborhood family dentist he had had since childhood. – "an old-time dentist with good hands – a man of the people" This fellow dentist – Dr. Miller – suggested that Mel open a practice in the same neighborhood in which he had grown up, Long Beach, but at a reasonable distance from his own offices so as to avoid any competition. Mel found a suitable storefront and opened his practice there. He quickly outgrew this space and bought a home across the street from the storefront, and set about renovating it himself. He became "an electrician, a plumber, a draftsman, a sociologist and psychiatrist...dentists have to do a little of everything", he says.

After 20 years as a solo practitioner, Mel took on a younger partner, and the two of them worked together for the next 20 years, with Mel finally winding down and deciding to retire to the Berkshires in 2006. He and Jane had been enjoying their weekends in the area for many years. They bought a house in Otis in 1992 and set about making it a year round residence. Now he had finally retired and he thought he was ready to do something else, but after about a month he found he really missed dentistry. "This is who I am, dentistry is what defines me!" he says.

A friend who is a VIM supporter, suggested that he visit the clinic to see what was going on there. As soon as he walked in he liked it immediately; liked the people he met, liked the atmosphere. He could see that the dental clinic was backlogged, and they couldn't wait for him to join the team. So he began the process of becoming licensed in Massachusetts, which turned out to be a much longer, more drawn-out affair than he had imagined. due to the Commonwealth's beurocracy. It was a year before it was finally concluded.

In the meantime he began working as

a dental assistant to one of the volunteer dentists on staff. He maintains he was not a good assistant, but it was a great way of getting to know the organization and to meet his future workmates.

"I am always very informal with my patients - I learned this from my mentor - putting the patients at ease is really important. I love to joke around with them, because some patients come in feeling apprehensive, especially children. I find a few calming words to win them over. For me it's never been about the dentistry, but the people I meet that keep me going. If I hadn't gone into dentistry, I might have been in medicine or become a teacher – it would have to involve interacting with other people" He has a smattering of several languages and uses them to good advantage...Russian, German, Polish, Spanish, French..."just a few phrases in some languages, more in others, but it all helps".

"One of the things I like about VIM is that you can set your own schedule, and you don't have to be bothered with the administrative side of things. Someone else takes care of that, and you can do pure dentistry - we may not do the most sophisticated procedures, but we do really good clinical work here. All the clinicians who work at VIM, in every field, are real professionals".

As his wife sends him off to the clinic each week she tells him that he's "doing such good things for the community by working at VIM". Mel insists that "VIM is doing me a favor, not the other way around! I really think this is a wonderful clinic, doing wonderful things, and it keeps me in the game!" Besides his work with VIM, these days Mel enjoys a little gardening, some painting and writing children's stories.

Communications Report

The Communications Committee has been hard at work developing a new website for VIM. It will be launched very soon. Deelux Design created for us a vastly improved look, which we hope you will enjoy and visit often. We would like to recognize the many hours that Nancy Fernandez Mills put in to coordinate this project. A special thank you also goes to Bill Charette who shot the beautiful video of the clinic "at work", to Nancy's husband, Mark Mills, who is narrating, and to Tricia Bevan, Bridget Ford Hughes, and Pat Molholt.

Catherine Mandel,
Communications Chair

VIM Board of Trustees Elects Ross A. Reife, MD, MBA



Ross A. Reife was elected to the VIM Board of Trustees in January of 2012. Dr. Reife firmly believes in VIM's mission of providing access to free, quality health care for income qualified, uninsured and under-insured residents of the Berkshires in a respectful and caring manner. He has spent his professional career involved in health care; he expects that his diverse medical background in both private and academic practice as well as within the research & development and commercial areas of major global pharmaceutical companies will help him work with the Board to further VIM's mission.

Ross achieved his MD and MBA degrees from Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Columbia University Business School, respectively. After completing his residency in neurology, Ross spent ten years in practice as a clinical neurologist, with hospital and academic appointments at medical centers. He spent the last part of his career as a pharmaceutical industry executive and, in this role, was involved in creating access to pharmaceutical products for patients who needed them in less privileged parts of the world.

Ross feels very fortunate that soon after coming to the Berkshires, he and his wife were told about VIM by a friend, Mel Feldman, who is a volunteer dentist (interviewed in this issue). Ross and his wife, Carol, an internist who now sees patients at VIM and has contributed medical columns for the newsletter, were immediately impressed with the mission and the vision of VIM and have become increasingly involved in VIM's activities. Ross is thrilled that his election to the Board of Trustees will afford him more opportunities to help this extremely worthy and important organization.

Medical Corner

Continued from Page 1

and interrupts continuity of medical care.

A woman who had previously been followed at VIM when she was a resident of the local shelter, was able to move to a new apartment and get insurance. She had recently lost her job. She was denied unemployment and found herself back in the situation she had worked so hard to change. Where she would go for insurance was not clear to her. She felt demoralized and did not want to go back to asking for help. "What's the point", she said, "the system just keeps knocking me down". These moments are crucial turning points in a patient's life. They need reassurance to refocus and find their options.

The lapse in coverage and reorganization takes an emotional, financial and physical toll. Patients who have engaged in new relationships with primary providers now are without care. This can be particularly devastating if a patient is taking medication for serious conditions or have mental health concerns.

It is my understanding that the number of patients who may lose coverage is approximately 30%. There are several reasons that continue to contribute to this problem, many of

them economic. However VIM provides a place where patients can return to receive continuity of medical and dental care during this transition.

Success in helping patients apply for appropriate health insurance programs seems to correlate to "owning" the process with the patient. Not just telling them how to follow the steps required but actually "seeing" it through until they are covered and have a new primary care home. When details get "dropped" starting over can waste time and delay the outcome.

We work very closely with local hospitals and Advocacy For Access, an agency responsible for assisting patients in applying for appropriate health insurance coverage and for identifying barriers that patients may encounter.

VIM patients benefit from case management that connects patient insurance information to billing departments. This helps providers get reimbursed for services rendered. One day recently at VIM I received 5 unpaid bills that one patient had received. The patient

had health insurance to cover the costs however the specialists did not have the correct information. VIM was able to coordinate payment of those unpaid bills with their insurance carriers. It was a relief to this family to not have the financial burden of the bills they had received and 5 different providers were now going to be compensated.

Owning the problem and seeing it through is key. VIM remains an essential clinic in our community where the uninsured can continue to receive healthcare and get "a leg up" to keep moving forward. Hopefully this investment in educating patients and helping them to understand the insurance process will soon result in fewer "repeat" applications and will stabilize the coverage.

Coupon books are still for sale.

Don't miss out on those big savings!

Call
413 528-4014.



Development Corner

The response to VIM's year-end appeal was gratifying. David Grover's compelling story of VIM saving his musical career clearly resonated with many people (it even made the front page of the Berkshire Eagle!), and we extend our thanks to David for his willingness to go public with his personal saga. And we extend sincere and heartfelt thanks to the nearly 300 generous people who responded with over \$53,000 in contributions. Your support buoys us all, as we continue our work to make our community better, one patient at a time.

And if you haven't made an annual gift to VIM in a while, there's no need to wait until the end of the year -- you can donate online, by phone, or by mail any time, and it will have an immediate impact on our ability to meet our monthly operating expenses.

Now that Spring has sprung, we are planning our two major fundraising events of the year. First up is the ever-popular Fabulous Chef's Dinner at the Old Inn on the Green (see below) on Monday, May 21. Chaired by the one and only Vicki Bonnington, this is an evening of spectacular food and conviviality in a beautiful, candle-lit setting. Get your tickets early -- this event always fills up fast!

VIM's Annual Gala will take place on Saturday, August 9, and will be held once again at the incredible home/health retreat/sculpture studio of Bridget Ford Hughes and Jonathan Prince, The Pastures (see below). And this year, we'll all enjoy dinner together right on site. So mark your calendars and save the date.

Invitations will be in the mail soon, and further information will be posted to VIM's website as it becomes available.

Both events are great ways that you can provide critical support to VIM while enjoying a wonderful evening out, with good food, good drink, and good friends. We look forward to seeing you there.

Save the Date

Monday, May 21st at 6:30 p.m.

VIM's
6th Annual Fabulous Chefs Dinner

The Old Inn on the Green



This wonderful benefit evening takes place in one of the most beautiful inns in New England where Peter's reputation as an outstanding chef draws fine food enthusiasts from near and far. The intimate, candle-lit rooms with their hand-painted murals provide a warm and festive place to come to have dinner with your friends or share an evening filled with good cheer with friends-in-the-making.

An evening of world-class food with fun and interesting dinner companions – who could ask for more?

For the 6th year, Peter is generously offering his Old Inn On The Green to VIM and has invited several other renowned local chefs. Each of the chefs will create a special dish accompanied by a wine skillfully selected and very generously donated by Ed Domaney of Domaney's in Great Barrington. Returning this year are Chefs Dan Smith of John Andrews, Shelly Williams of Haven Café & Bakery, Adam Zieminski of Café Adam as well as The Inn's pastry chef, Shirl Gard and Gustavo Perez from the Southfield Store.

Do not miss this fabulous evening: there are only 75 lucky people who can be accommodated at the Inn for this unique dinner! Please call VIM now at 413 528-4014 to reserve.

VIM'S 2012 GALA RETURNS, THURSDAY AUGUST 9

You will not want to miss this unique fundraising evening!

VIM returns to The Pastures, the magnificent home of VIM Board of Trustees member, Bridget Ford Hughes, and her husband, noted sculptor Jonathan Prince. This spectacular location, which features a reflecting pool and beautifully designed gardens displaying Jonathan's sculptures, was the location for VIM's 2011 Gala. The evening will start at 6PM with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres lovingly prepared by local caterer Rita Welsh, followed by dinner on site. There will be an auction with absolutely fabulous and unique prizes.

If you missed this event last year, here is your chance to see this gorgeous home and to partake in this fun party!

Call the clinic NOW at 413-528-4104 to sign up for this one-of-a-kind event!



2011 Gala at The Pastures.

Photograph by Edward Acker.

Volunteer Corner

by Susan Minnich

The clinic has been quite busy since the last issue of this newsletter. Happily quite a few new volunteers have joined VIM since that time, many of whom have jumped right in and taken on major projects.

They include Tricia Bevan, who is very active photographing volunteers and writing about them for the new VIM website and the newsletter. Graphic designer Aurelien de St. Andre is redesigning and producing our posters and invitations, making them more visually effective and compelling.

Three new volunteers are found at the reception desk. Martha Booth is at the front desk every other Thursday. Myrna Figueiredo is here at the busy Wednesday afternoon session every week, where her fluency in English, Portuguese and Spanish is immeasurably helpful. Christine Ludwizewski is found at reception every Tuesday morning, in addition to helping with VIM's fundraising efforts.

As the annual number of

clinical visits grows here at VIM, the administrative work required to support clinical care grows correspondingly. Happily, new volunteers Dotty Callahan and Olga Maryshchuk are here regularly, helping to keep that workload up to date. Laura Katz brings her expertise to VIM, and is helping to make our data base function more efficiently.

Many of our patients require interpretation and we are glad to welcome several new interpreters. In addition to Myrna, very recently Nicole Campanale and Rosemary Perry have joined the clinic volunteer staff as interpreters.

Clinical efforts are greatly supported and increased by the work of new medical volunteers. Just this month nurses Laura Elliott and Pat Harper have joined the medical team.

Nutrition has two new volunteers, James Conzo and Erika Tilley. Jim saw his first patients in March and will be here monthly. Erika is here once or twice a month counseling VIM patients.

Therapist Ethan Dufault joins the other volunteers who provide therapy for VIM patients, and will see patients monthly.

Finally, we are happy to say that two new doctors have joined the VIM volunteer staff. They are Dr. Burton Miller, who will be working with the Quality Assurance team, and Dr. Arthur Safran, who sees patients monthly at the Monday morning medical clinic.

Everyone involved at VIM welcomes all these new volunteers. And as always, a big thanks goes not only to these new volunteers but to everyone whose work makes the existence of the clinic possible. I mentioned the communications committee in the text above. It is hard at work increasing our media presence, both on Facebook and on the new website. If you use Facebook, be sure to check the VIM presence there. And keep an eye out for the new website. It should be live before the summer returns.

Tributes

VIM is pleased to accept contributions recognizing special occasions in the lives of family, friends, and colleagues.

In honor of Susan Bartsch: Michael Bartsch

In honor of Hildi & Walter Black: Todd and Wendi Strier

In honor of Estella Ortiz Bodnar: Carol J. McGlinchey

In honor of Vicki Bonnington for chairing the Old Inn Dinner:
Laurence Schecker

In honor of Anne Chase: Christine Saurel

In honor of Clara & David Londoner's 45th Anniversary:
Dick and Stephanie Solar
Nancy Lee Hartman

In honor of the Peisner Family: Bonnie & John Garber

In honor of Dr. Mel Feldman: Ken & Amy Arlein

In honor of Dr. & Mrs. Gerard Fromm: Leona Ruth Cooperman

In honor of David Grover:
Lisa Avery
Dan and Linda Dillon

In honor of Matt Mandel and his recent award:
Carol Andrea Whitcomb

In honor of Matt & Catherine Mandel:
Georg and Benita Koman
Bernice Matty
Linda Olson

In honor of Peter & Ellen Rowntree:
Sue and Art Kaufman
John & Marilyn Wightman

In honor of Marion Simon: Jill Pranger

In honor of Dr. Paul Smilow:
Sue & Howard Gorham
Marni Smilow Levitt
Martin E. Messinger
The Brick-Smilow Family

In honor of Paul & Turbi Smilow: Peri Smilow

In memory of Eli & Mollie Cooper: Dianne Cooper Bridges

In memory of Mary W. Doores: Larry Doores

In memory of E.H. Leu: Pat Moholt

In memory of Joseph Levine, MD: Ann Levine

In memory of Ken Nash: Marion Simon

In memory of Celia Pawlish: Marion Simon

In memory of Len Simon:
Amnon Goodman
Timothy & Janice Hanna
Paul & Miriam Levine
Philip & Jean McAdam
Mona Miller
Raymond & Holly Murray
Jill Pranger
Rosalie Wolf

In memory of Michael Vale: Nancy Vale

In memory of Molly Verebay: Leonard and Dianne Salamon

If you would like to honor someone by making a gift to VIM Berkshires, please call the Clinic at 413-528-4014.



the pastures

VIM'S ANNUAL GALA

THURSDAY EVENING, AUGUST 9, 2012

COCKTAILS AND DINNER IN THE GARDENS

SAVE THE DATE

For reservations, please call the clinic at 413 528-4014.



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VOICES

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