



Moira P. Larsen, MD, MBA, FCAP

Big-Picture Thinking

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While just about everyone agrees that interdisciplinary teamwork is critical to a high-functioning medical staff, not everyone thinks they have time for it. As a transformational pathologist, Moira P. Larsen, MD, MBA, FCAP, makes the time.

Transformational pathologists are big-picture people, physicians who recognize the singular and important ways that pathology contributes to quality patient care. They also recognize the value of quality patient education, which is why the CAP provides MyBiopsy.org, and also why Dr. Larsen takes part in the breast health program that her hospital's corporate parent, MedStar Health, organizes with a local news station.

“For Breast Health Awareness month in October, our hospital participates in a day-long call-in,” Dr. Larsen says. “Every year, I serve on that call bank, taking calls from people with questions about breast health and resources.” The four Baltimore hospitals in the regional MedStar Health system send staff. “It’s oncologists, surgeons, nurses, and cancer navigators,” she says. “I think I’m the only pathologist. We all take calls. Because you have people with all sorts of expertise, we can flip calls back and forth.”

Dr. Larsen tapes hometown radio interviews as a CAP spokesperson, and when she does, she looks for opportunities to promote College patient education tools, especially MyBiopsy.org and MyHealthTestReminder.org. “I have been impressed with the quality of materials that is available [on MyBiopsy.org],” Dr. Larsen said. “The information is up-to-date, valid, and very understandable.”

Not long ago, the patient newsletter published by Dr. Larsen’s hospital (which reaches 60,000 local homes) sent out a call for patient websites that might be featured, and she told them about MyBiopsy.org. “This very much fits with our philosophy of whole health and wellness and

reaching out to the community,” she said. “There is so much out there on the Web. People can get confused and misinformed.”

Dr. Larsen chairs the Department of Pathology at Baltimore’s 317-bed Good Samaritan Hospital, where she serves as vice president of the medical executive committee and chairs both the hospital’s CME Committee and the Literature and Medicine Program. Eleven years after finishing her clinical fellowship in pathology at Johns Hopkins (where she had attended medical school and served as chief resident), she enrolled in the Johns Hopkins University School of Professional Studies in Business and Education to earn a master’s degree in business administration. When she finished that degree in 2005, the faculty named her student of the year for excellence and enthusiasm.

That enthusiasm is evident when the conversation turns to professional collaboration. “I am on a team that has been developed to review utilization and patient care,” she says. “It involves internal medicine physicians, residents, emergency department physicians, and representatives from the hospital risk management and safety committees.”

“We looked at the utilization specifically of the BNP (brain natriuretic protein) and D-dimer,” Dr. Larsen says, “and identified an opportunity to educate clinicians in more appropriate use. In the last four months we have seen a decline by one-third in the usage of these tests, eliminating unnecessary use and subsequent tests that would be performed on these patients due to misinterpretation.”

“We are going to be looking at transfusion medicine and other testing in the hospitals as a group and using this integrated approach to alter physician behavior to enhance patient safety and patient care,” Dr. Larsen says. A multispecialty team can more effectively encourage clinicians to change their testing choices than just one pathologist, she observes. “It’s critical to have the buy-in of all the different departments,” Dr. Larsen concludes, “and to have everyone working in concert toward specific goals.”

Or, some would say, working toward a shared understanding of the big picture.