

RICHARD CANTOR, MD '76, HS '79

A Lifetime of Achievement



For many physicians, retirement is a time to set medicine on the shelf to focus on leisure pursuits. For Richard Cantor, MD '76, HS '79, retirement from clinical medicine provides more time for the advancement of pediatric emergency medicine on a state and national scale.

Dr. Cantor, who served as a professor in emergency medicine and pediatrics and directed Upstate's Department of Pediatric Emergency Medicine from 1984 until 2019, is completing a textbook with Oxford Press, *Teaching Cases in Pediatric Emergency Medicine*, and with funding from a Children's

Network Grant, is filming a series of 10-minute teaching case videos that will be distributed to medical school and residency programs nationwide. "I'm still giving about a dozen Grand Rounds lectures a year and speaking at six or eight annual meetings," he says.

In July, Cantor was honored with the Edward W. Gilmore Lifetime Achievement Award from the New York American College of Emergency Medicine Physicians. The career award recognizes pioneering spirit and career dedication to the field of emergency medicine and is given for significant contributions to the specialty through education, leadership, mentoring, and the advancement of quality emergency medicine care.

It's a fitting honor given his role in helping establish the field of pediatric emergency medicine, both at Upstate and nationally. He has written dozens of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters and edited five textbooks in the field; served as president of the Society for Pediatric Emergency Medicine from 1990 to 1995, and as a longtime member of the subsection that wrote the PEM curriculum and board exam; and served as editor and national course director of the Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) course.

When Cantor was a pediatric resident at Upstate in the late 1970s, there was no such thing as a subspecialty of pediatric emergency medicine (PEM). But the young doctor knew he was happiest in emergent situations—the NICU, ICU, and ED. "I liked the immediate gratification. If you make the right clinical decision, you know within about 20 minutes that you made a good move," he says.

Emergency medicine residencies were in their infancy when Upstate launched its program, with Cantor recruited to handle pediatrics along with colleague Celeste Madden, MD '77, HS '80. "We worked the emergency department from 1 pm to 10 pm when the flow was high and saw about 4,000 kids a year," Cantor recalls of the early days. He became involved with the emerging PEM subspecialty nationwide and used what he learned to build a curriculum to teach emergency medicine to pediatric residents.

Cantor credits John McCabe, MD '79, then chair of emergency medicine at Upstate and later CEO of University Hospital, for all that came next. "He was a huge leader in the field who set an example and paved the way for the rest of us," says Cantor. "I could not have accomplished what I did here without his support."

In 1984, PEM became a board-certified subspecialty of pediatrics and Upstate launched a fellowship program, directed by Cantor. The Upstate PEM fellowship was one of the first programs to accept emergency medicine residents, rather than only pediatrics residents. The program thrived and Cantor takes pride in training and retaining talent from within, with many Upstate alumni within the ranks of the PEM faculty.

Around the same time, Cantor took over the Poison Control Center, which was primarily focused on pediatric poison prevention, responding to 3,000 calls annually. New York consolidated poison control centers throughout the state to just two—one at Bellevue Hospital in New York City and one at Upstate, and Cantor expanded the program with the addition of pharmacologists and additional toxicologists. The Upstate New York Poison Center now fields some 55,000 calls a year, many related to drug

overdose. Cantor was named Medical Director Emeritus when he stepped down from his leadership role.

"Dr. Cantor is largely responsible for making the Upstate New York Poison Center what it is today," says Vince Calleo, MD '14, HS '19, F '21, medical director of the Upstate New York Poison Center and assistant professor of emergency medicine and pediatrics. "Though he is a nationally known and respected figure, he is never too busy to help guide and mentor students, residents, and fellows to allow them to achieve their potential."

"As a graduate of the College of Medicine, I chose PEM because of Dr. Cantor. I stayed for pediatrics residency, and for pediatric emergency fellowship because of Dr. Cantor," adds Asalim Thabet, MD '09, G '13, F '16, associate professor of emergency medicine and clinical professor of pediatrics at Upstate. "Not only has he influenced every PEM graduate of Upstate, but he continues to imprint his academic excellence on those around the nation."

Cantor was recognized for his teaching both locally, as recipient of Upstate's President's Award for Teaching in 1994, and nationally by the American College of Emergency Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics. He continues to work with Upstate PEM fellows as a voluntary faculty member.

One of Cantor's most visible legacies is University Hospital's pediatric emergency room, which opened in 2016. The \$3-million renovation transformed the fourth floor into a state-of-the-art facility rivaling the best in the state. "It finally gave us the physical space for patients that matched the quality of the medical care provided," says Cantor.

But Cantor's greatest impact may be the growth of the PEM field itself. Today, PEM is the second-most competitive pediatric subspecialty in the country, following pediatric surgery, with a 3.8 to 1 ratio of applicants to fellowship spots nationally, and much higher at Upstate.

"I'm blessed that my first job was my best job," he says. "I'm a lucky man."