



Distinguished Alumna

Mary E. Fallat, MD '79

Mary E. Fallat, MD '79, professor of surgery at the University of Louisville School of Medicine, is a pediatric surgeon and pioneer in pediatric trauma care, committed to improving the treatment of injured children through system development, research, and advocacy locally, regionally, and nationally.

Dr. Fallat grew up in Auburn, New York, and attended Northwestern University, where she majored in biology. She came to Upstate interested in surgery at a time when surgery was still a male-dominated field. At the suggestion of a fourth-year roommate, she asked Pat Numann, MD '65 to serve as her advisor, which would launch an important mentorship and life-long friendship.

After a pediatrics rotation with Frank Oski, MD, had her reconsidering her career choice, Dr. Numann suggested Fallat do an acting internship in pediatric surgery to clarify her interests. "That's when I decided to pursue pediatric surgery," she says.

As a resident in general surgery at the University of Louisville, Fallat spent a collective 12 months doing trauma care. When she did her pediatric surgery fellowship at Children's Hospital National Medical Center in Washington, D.C., Fallat was impressed by that institution's sophisticated trauma team concept for delivering care to children. "Between those two experiences, I became confidently experienced with pediatric trauma," she says.

When she joined the University of Louisville as a pediatric surgeon in 1987, Kosair (now Norton) Children's Hospital had no formal trauma program. During her first year on the job, she wrote a strategic plan for a Trauma Services Program and presented it to the administration. The proposal was implemented, becoming the first dedicated pediatric trauma service in the state of Kentucky and encompassed all aspects of emergency care: EMS, communications center, emergency helicopter service, emergency room care, and the deliberate comprehensive treatment for the injured. Fallat was named director of trauma services, a position she held until 2005.

Simultaneously, Fallat developed a leadership role in the American College of Surgeons Committee on Trauma, leading the initiative in Kentucky that culminated in trauma system legislation in 2008. She has been continuously funded as principal investigator for federal grants supporting the Kentucky EMS for Children program since 1993. She participated in the Institute of Medicine project "The Future of Emergency Care in the U.S. Health System" as a member of the subcommittee on Pediatric Emergency Care and has twice led the initiative to revise the national Equipment for Ambulances list. In 2019, Fallat received the Pediatric Trauma Society Lifetime Achievement Award, given to professionals who have had the

biggest impact on improving trauma care nationwide.

But trauma is only one area of specialty. Prior to her pediatric surgery fellowship, Fallat did a research surgery fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital, working with Pat Donahoe, MD, who studied hormones that influence the embryology of the reproductive system and the abnormalities that sometimes require surgery. Dr. Donahoe let Fallat continue to use her hormone assay to branch into her own area of research. Early in her tenure on faculty at Louisville, she was granted a research sabbatical to work with John Hutson at the University of Melbourne, who was doing work related to the undescended testicle. When she returned to Louisville, she started a research lab focusing aspects of male and female reproductive endocrinology, which was funded for 25 years.

Fallat has been a leader in pediatric medical ethics, beginning during her time as a young faculty member advocating for ovary sparing surgery in the treatment of benign disease. Fallat served on the Committee on Bioethics for the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and was the first surgeon to chair this national committee. She has written AAP position statements on pediatric professionalism, fertility preservation for children and adolescents who have cancer, and resuscitation strategies for terminally ill children who need surgery. Guide-



Dr. Fallat with her medical school advisor and mentor, Patricia Numann, MD '65



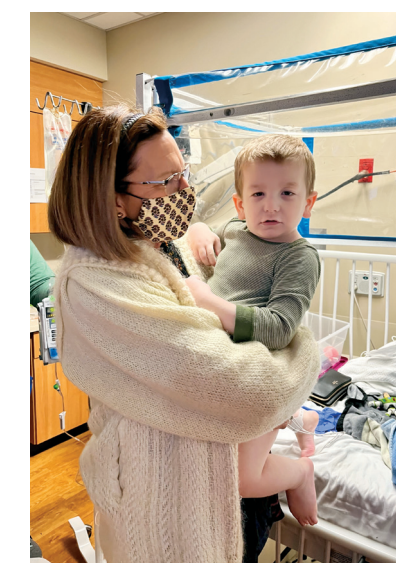
Dr. Fallat with her family in Bermuda in 2014, from left: Andrew Walker, Tom Walker, Mary, Alex Walker, and Krista Walker

lines she developed have become standard, earning her recognition by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2022 with the William G. Bartholome Award for Ethical Excellence.

Fallat has a long history of service and leadership. She has served as chair of the American College of Surgeons Advisory Council for Pediatric Surgery, chair of the Surgical Section of the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), vice president of the American Association for the Surgery of Trauma, and president of the American Pediatric Surgical Association. In 2020, she became chair of the American Pediatric Surgical Association Foundation.

At Louisville, she has served as both surgeon-in-chief and medical director of surgical quality at Norton Children's Hospital; program director of the pediatric surgery fellowship training program; division director of pediatric surgery; and was named the first Hirikati S. Nagaraj Endowed Professor in the Department of

Surgery. In 2020, Fallat began a phased retirement that will conclude in 2026. Her current focus is as a sub-investigator to develop a national program of pediatric readiness for EMS and emergency departments, concentrating on trauma and burns, through the HRSA-funded Pediatric Pandemic Network.



Dr. Fallat with a young patient

Fallat has received numerous awards throughout her career, including the University of Louisville Distinguished Faculty Award, the American Academy of Pediatrics' William E. Ladd Medal, the American Pediatric Surgery Association Distinguished Service Award, and the Norton HealthCare Physician of the Year.

Outside of her busy work schedule, Fallat enjoys spending time with her husband and three children, especially traveling. She and her daughter head to Morocco in November on an ambassador trip with the American Association for the Surgery of Traumas, and a family trip to Antarctica is planned for early 2025.