

March 12, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my privilege to nominate Dr. James Hardee, Internist at Kaiser Permanente Westminister, for the 2020-2021 Best Patient/Physician Communication Skills Golden Stethoscope Award. Dr. Hardee demonstrates daily that a physician's prowess in patient communication is equally as important as his/her clinical and diagnostic skills. His practice cares primarily for elderly patients, many of whom have remained with his clinic for twenty or more years. This type of decades long physician-patient relationship is increasingly rare in the American healthcare system, but his patients keep coming back as they deeply trust the care he provides. Dr. Hardee's patients know they will be heard and their concerns addressed, largely due to his clear communication style and commitment to shared decision making processes. His patients trust that whatever issue arises in their health (and there are so many issues in the health of our geriatric patients), they will not be alone in facing it.

During my two years precepting with Dr. Hardee, I have watched him guide patients through conversations on transitioning to hospice care, processing grief following the death of a spouse, diagnosing early signs of dementia, and so much more. Each of these patient encounters, though, began not with a rushed hello and a quick jump into the issue. They instead began with questions about the patient's kids, dog, small business, or family reunion. In a Kaiser building that is the medical home for over 30,000 patients, Dr. Hardee's patients know they will always be remembered.

Dr. Hardee has contributed many communication and clinical pearls to my education. He always elicits his patients' perspectives, leaves space and silences for patients to process difficult news, and forms a workup plan together with his patient. My favorite pearl from Dr. Hardee is his unique form of discharge summary. On the back of each patient's intake paper detailing their vitals, Dr. Hardee writes a quick numbered to-do-list (ex: #1 Go to the lab for bloodwork, #2 Fill new prescription at pharmacy, #3 Call me in three weeks with how the new medication is going). For elderly patients with memory challenges or those facing difficult diagnoses, these little lists provide a clear summary and path forward for their care. Dr. Hardee's clinical style is quite literally the rubric to an FDC Communication Skills Exam. I am not the first to notice his great strengths in communication either—he teaches communication skills to Kaiser physicians across the country.

So much of our first two years of medical school is focused on learning to connect, communicate, and build relationships with our patients. Dr. Hardee has taught me, and twenty years of precepting students before me, exactly how to do just that. It has been a tremendous privilege learning and growing as a future physician under his tutelage. I wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Hardee for this award.

Sincerely,

Caroline Vance  
University of Colorado School of Medicine  
M.D. Program, Class of 2023 (Phase II)