Chapter 2

History of Jefferson

Founding

Although formally established in 1969, Thomas Jefferson University actually dates back to 1824 when Jefferson Medical College (JMC) was founded by Dr. George McClellan. At the beginning of the 19th century, only four colleges in the United States possessed medical schools – Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard and Dartmouth. For several years, Penn alumni and supporters successfully blocked all efforts to form an additional school. Led by Dr. McClellan, a group of men hit upon a strategy to bypass the situation.

In 1824, McClellan and others petitioned Jefferson College at Canonsburg to add a medical school. While technically part of Jefferson College, Jefferson Medical College was located in Philadelphia with administrative and financial responsibility in the hands of the faculty. Although challenged by the University of Pennsylvania, in 1826 the Pennsylvania Legislature passed a bill that ratified the actions of Jefferson College. This allowed the College to grant medical degrees — graduating students with experience in supervised participation in the care of patients, a revolutionary approach to medical education at the time.

With the growth of Jefferson Medical College, the school constructed the Ely Building in 1828 – complete with a lecture hall in the lower floor and the “Pit”, a 700-seat amphitheater to allow students to view surgeries. Jefferson’s first free-standing hospital and the second hospital in the nation connected to a medical school, admitted 441 inpatients and treated 4,659 outpatients during its first year of operation.

Famous Faculty

At mid-century the medical college boasted notable Jefferson alumni and strong college faculty. Professors of the 1841 “famous faculty” included Robley Dunglison (Institutes of Medicine), John K. Mitchell (Practice of Medicine), Joseph Pancoast (Anatomy), Thomas D. Mütter (Practice of Surgery), Charles D. Meigs (Obstetrics), Franklin Bache (Chemistry) and Robert Huston (Materia Medica). In 1856, a renowned graduate, Samuel D. Gross, MD (class of 1828), returned to bestow upon his alma mater a reputation that has lasted to this day. Dr. Gross was pre-eminent in the medical profession. The finest surgeon of his time, an educator of the highest distinction, and author of 14 books, Dr. Gross (immortalized in artist Thomas Eakins’ “The Gross Clinic”) considered himself to be first and foremost a physician who devoted much time to family practice.

Expansion to Today

In 1891, Jefferson created Jefferson Hospital Training School for Nurses. Now known as Jefferson School of Nursing, it offers a continuum of fully-accredited nursing degree programs, from baccalaureate through doctoral levels.

By 1949, Jefferson Medical College included advanced degrees in anatomy, bacteriology, immunology, etc. in its curriculum. The formation of the School of Allied Health Sciences in 1967 began a move toward the integration of other health professions into the Jefferson curriculum. Now known as the
Jefferson School of Health Professions (JSHP), it is comprised of six health professions programs – Bio-science Technologies, Couple & Family Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant Studies, and Radiologic Sciences – and the Professional & Continuing Studies department, which offers general education courses, including associate and bachelor degree programs. JSHP students earn degrees ranging from Bachelor of Science through clinical doctorate.

The Jefferson Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences (JGSBS) offers courses and programs across a wide field of basic and translational biomedical sciences leading to the PhD degree, the MS degree, and to graduate certificate programs.

The Jefferson School of Pharmacy was founded in 2008. It has an innovative curriculum that effectively advances health through teaching, research and service. Its Doctor of Pharmacy program is accredited by the Accreditation Council for Pharmaceutical Education.

As the first designated School of Population Health in the country, the Jefferson School of Population Health (JSPH), also founded in 2008, is dedicated to the exploration of policies and forces that determine the health and quality of life of populations locally, nationally, and globally. Accordingly, the JSPH mission is to prepare leaders with global vision to develop, implement, and evaluate health policies and systems that improve the health of populations and thereby enhance the quality of life.

In 2014, Thomas Jefferson University received a $110 million gift – the single largest in its history – from the Sidney Kimmel Foundation. The donation was made to Jefferson Medical College; and the College was renamed the Sidney Kimmel Medical College (SKMC) at Thomas Jefferson University on June 17, 2014.

Today, we are the largest free-standing health sciences university in Philadelphia. Thomas Jefferson University, along with its clinical partner, Jefferson University Hospitals treats more than 46,000 inpatients and 1,000,000 outpatients every year.