

Getting Back to Basics

New Sosa Academy to provide resources to better train students.

In early 1969 an entrepreneur named Phil Morse approached Julio Sosa, M.D., the founder and director of Albany Med's then-fledgling cath lab, with an idea. He was convinced that he had developed a better coronary valve system and he wanted to know what Sosa, a pioneer in the field, thought of it. Sosa was intrigued and, over the course of the next 18 months, he helped Morse perfect cardiology's first transparent manifold system. Known as the Morse Manifold, the device was soon being used to diagnose patients in cardiac cath labs worldwide. In fact, the disposable version of the Morse Manifold is currently being used in more than 70 percent of cardiac catheterization procedures.

While they made technological improvements to many devices over the years, in the mid 1970s Morse found their roles reversed when Sosa and his staff developed an idea for a pressurized contrast delivery system. With the same cooperation and dedication, they worked to develop what was to become known as the "Sosa Contrast Delivery System," the first product of its kind.

During their decades of collaboration, neither Morse, the founder of Namic, USA of Glens Falls, nor Sosa was ever motivated by the desire for fame or fortune. In fact, when they first met they were impressed by each other's down-to-earth nature and mutual desire to benefit patients by developing new and safer medical devices.

"I saw a lot of myself in Phil," Sosa recalls. "He was hard-working, determined, and an honest man and wanted to find answers, as I did. And that's what we proceeded to do."

Now at an age when many of their colleagues are choosing to slow down, the two have switched from joint research and development to perhaps their most challenging collaboration yet—an innovative educational enterprise to be known as the Sosa Academy at Albany Medical College.

With the blessing of Dean Vincent Verdile, M.D., The Sosa Academy is being established at AMC to train medical students to become more compassionate and responsible to their patients. To this end, Morse recently donated \$1.5 million to the College. Morse remains committed to business enterprises, having recently founded Heritage Creations, a firm headquartered in Jupiter, Fla., with plants in Glens Falls and Bend, Oregon, that designs, builds and installs custom pro shops. In his spare time, he is an owner and vice chairman of the Boston Red Sox.

Morse pointed out that his gift to the Pillars Campaign to establish the Sosa Academy was his way of saying thanks to an esteemed friend and, in the process, create a legacy to benefit future generations. "Dr. Sosa is a great man who has done so much for so many for so long," Morse says. "I believe the Academy will be a fitting tribute to his years of dedication to the patients and to the Medical College he has served so well."

"I have often wondered if there would be the 600 plus jobs in Glens Falls (at Namic) if it weren't for the incredible cooperation and positive support I received from Dr. Sosa over the years," he continues. "On behalf of our family and the family of Namic Associates, we are honored to have played a part in making his dream a reality."

By stressing the importance of educational efforts, the Sosa Academy is intended to counter current trends in academic medicine that limit the time faculty can spend on educational activities.

"The need for academic health sciences centers to maintain healthy bottom lines has forced clinical faculty to focus their efforts on patient care and scientific faculty—facing similar competitive pressures—have had to step up their efforts to win research grants. The result has been less time available for students, which many faculty members have expressed concerns about in recent years," says Verdile.

that students who graduate from Albany Med are both competent and compassionate physicians."

Verdile, who trained under Sosa as a student here in the 1980s, said the Academy was named after his mentor because "few individuals in the history of our institution could serve as a better model for our students than Dr. Sosa. He is curious and passionate about medicine and filled with compassion and sensitivity for his patients and these are the characteristics we want our students to have as they enter the profession."

Sosa, himself, understands the power and influence that a good mentor can have. He says he was fortunate enough to have been working alongside Mason Sones, M.D., at the Cleveland Clinic in 1969 when Sones performed the first coronary angiogram.

"It's important in your career that you get exposed to an eminent individual in your field of interest," Sosa says. "You come to realize that they have faults, are not perfect, and, in many ways, are ordinary people. You improve yourself by being around individuals like this."

Sosa made medical history himself, performing the first balloon angioplasty at Albany Med in 1979, making the Medical Center just the eighth institution in the world to perform this procedure. Nearly 20 years and thousands of patients later, in 1998, he performed the 40,000th cardiac catheterization at Albany Med. Despite his numerous achievements, Sosa considers his greatest contribution to be the mentoring he did over the years to cardiology fellows, residents and students.

The Sosa Academy's philosophy, as outlined by Sosa, is that practicing medicine is a privilege that carries three specific responsibilities:

- To provide the best possible care in a compassionate manner.
- To help train other physicians.
- To conduct research that will ensure better care in the future.

As Sosa tells medical students, "You need to perform an essay, not an exam, on your patient." When talking about the Academy, Sosa becomes animated and visibly moved. "I asked Dean Verdile to create a chair but never in my wildest imagination did I expect something like this. It is truly gratifying."

As Verdile envisions it, the Academy will pair, for example, newer faculty members with more senior ones, and educators will be awarded for their outstanding efforts in teaching both students and other faculty. Membership in the Academy will be competitive, he points out, to ensure that medical students get special attention from the very best faculty members.

The Sosa Academy will include an endowed chair, as well as an endowed professorship to provide supplemental support to faculty who promote the ideals of Sosa by dedicating their time to educating medical students and residents. Endowed research funds will allow the College to appoint and support a clinical scientist and an academic leader dedicated to research in medical education.

Sosa looks forward to playing an active role in the Academy as its first director. "In this day and age, when so many are motivated by money, we need to return to the idea that being a doctor is truly a privilege and an opportunity to give generously of oneself."



Benefactor Phil Morse, standing, poses with Dr. Sosa and his wife, Nancy, at a luncheon to announce the grant for the Sosa Academy.

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Following the lead of several innovative medical schools around the country, the Sosa Academy will establish a separate department of medical education to promote faculty educational efforts aimed at providing medical students with the best possible education. The Academy will promote such efforts through a variety of strategies including stipends, awards, seminars, workshops and other types of resource incentives.

"The Sosa Academy will provide financial and educational resources necessary to stimulate curriculum development and emphasize the doctor-patient relationship while not endangering the missions of research and patient care," explains Henry Pohl, vice dean for academic administration. "The educational components will ensure

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