

Their Finest Hour

By Joel Seligman

On January 19, I had the distinct pleasure to announce to a packed Flaum Atrium that Brad Berk would return as senior vice president for health sciences and CEO of our Medical Center and that Mark Taubman would become the new dean of the School of Medicine and Dentistry on March 1.

For Brad, this was a triumph of character. Since his severe spinal cord injury on May 30, 2009, he has devoted himself to a course of recovery that has been heroic in his determination, discipline, and unrelenting good spirits. Brad's triumph was a triumph, too, of his remarkable family. His wife, Mary, and their children, David, Sarah, and Mariah and Mariah's husband, Anthony, provided support, love, and occasional gentle teasing at every step of the way.

For the remarkable senior leadership team of the Medical Center, this was "their finest hour."

I will never forget joining Steve Goldstein, the CEO of Strong Memorial and Highland hospitals, Mike Goonan, the Medical Center's chief financial officer, Ray Mayewski, the hospitals' chief medical officer, and Peter Robinson, the Medical Center's chief operating officer and executive director of government relations, at Strong Memorial Hospital a few hours after Brad was brought by helicopter for emergency surgery. We were all stunned, hopeful Brad would recover, and deeply concerned for Mary and Brad's family.

Within a few hours that first day, we realized that we would need interim leadership for the Medical Center. I began a conversation with these four colleagues, and over the next 72 hours spoke to approximately 40 senior leaders of the Medical Center and of the University and Medical Center boards. A clear consensus rapidly emerged that Mark Taubman, chair of the Department of Medicine, the Medical Center's largest department, was the right individual to serve as acting CEO. Before I had finished my calls, I telephoned Mark, who was then in Shanghai but already on his way to the airport to return home. I asked him to see me when he returned, and after



completing my calls, asked him to be CEO until Brad returned. Mark did not hesitate.

Indeed none of the senior leaders in the Medical Center hesitated in the months that have transpired since that awful May day.

Not Steve Goldstein, who continued to run one of the most effective academic hospital systems in this country despite the pressure of unrelenting state budget cuts and unceasing uncertainty about the future of both federal and state laws governing health care finance and organization.

Nor Mark Taubman, who worked closely with the senior leadership team of the Medical Center to begin implementation of a new electronic medical records system and helped lead the redesign of a new bed expansion plan for Strong Memorial Hospital to make the plan more affordable and to begin bringing urgently needed beds online more rapidly. He also worked to implement cost-containment and quality and safety initiatives that Brad earlier had begun.


Nor Lissa McAnarney, the Medical Center's chair emerita of pediatrics, who had begun serving as acting dean of the School of Medicine and Dentistry shortly before

Brad's accident. Her first words to me after the accident were, "How can I help?"

Nor Rich Fisher, the director of the Wilmot Cancer Center, who took a leadership role in crafting an innovative expansion plan that will add three new floors to the Wilmot Cancer Center, creating space for 30 much-needed inpatient beds.

Nor Paul Levy, the vice chair of the Department of Medicine, who for a second time agreed to serve as acting chair of the department and who played a pivotal role mentoring several recently hired division chiefs.

Nor literally thousands of faculty, clinicians, nurses, and staff at every level in the Medical Center who stepped up their efforts in a time of need. CEO administrative staff members Joyce Goodberlet and Ellen Caruso, for example, responded almost instantly to revise calendars, maintain communications among the leadership team, and ensure that nothing material was lost.

All deserve our profound thanks. They not only preserved, but in some ways strengthened, a great medical center during unexpected and unsought circumstances. We have all come to appreciate how strong a team leads the Medical Center. And, as Brad put it so well on January 19, the Medical Center ultimately rededicated itself to being an institution with even greater focus on the care, safety, and centrality of all of our patients. 

▲ **TEAM EFFORT:** Interim CEO Mark Taubman (right) and other senior leaders at the Medical Center "deserve our profound thanks" for guiding the Medical Center until Brad Berk (left) returned this spring as CEO.