

Holly Peay Receives Prestigious School of Medicine Award. . .

In March, the School of Medicine presented Distinguished Alumni awards during its annual Black Tie/White Coat Gala. The school honored Holly Landrum Peay, Class of 1997, with its 2007 Distinguished Master's in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award.

In introducing the award recipients to the more than 400 people in attendance, then Interim Dean Richard Hoppmann, M.D. said he believed these alumni are “extraordinary people whose dedication, professionalism, and creativity make them leaders in their fields.” He emphasized the winners were singled out for distinction from a broad field of candidates by their colleagues, making the recognition especially meaningful. “We believe strongly that the quality of our school is largely determined by the character of our graduates,” he added.



Peay has garnered numerous accomplishments. After graduation, she remained in Columbia to work full time at the Department of Pediatrics Center for Disability Resources, an experience that led her to become the first genetic counselor hired by the National Alliance for Genetic Support Groups in Washington, DC.

Joseph McInerney, executive director of the National Coalition for Health Professional Education in Genetics, said Peay “demonstrated a set of abilities that one finds only rarely in someone still so young.” He was so impressed with her work, he hired her and assigned her two educational CD-ROM projects—the genetics of psychiatric disorders and the genetics of common disorders, respectively—that were distributed to a vast audience of primary care providers and public health professionals.

Ms. Peay currently serves as the Associate Director of the National Human Genome Institute-Johns Hopkins University Genetic Counseling Program. There she participated in a project in which Hopkins' genetic counselors helped identify bodies recovered after Hurricane Katrina. The experts assisted Louisiana state officials with the complex task of collecting data on family history, a key step in the complex system of DNA testing used to match the dead to some of the families of more than 2,000 people listed as missing from the disaster.

In March, Peay visited the School of Medicine to teach psychiatric genetics and to discuss her experiences following Katrina with genetic counseling students. She stressed that the unique skills of genetic counselors can be utilized in many ways. The genetic counselor's ability in grief and loss counseling, combined with pedigree skills and knowledge of molecular genetics, offered invaluable assistance in the aftermath of national disaster.

Peay became the sixth recipient of the Distinguished Master's in Genetic Counseling Alumni Award joining Sonja R. Eubanks, Class of 1995; Victoria A. Vincent, Class of 1987; and Christine E. Miller, Class of 1989, Jill Fischer, Class of 1993 and Cam Brasington, Class of 1988.

*Article by Sam Morton
School of Medicine*