

MEDICAL CENTER

Berk Is Back

GOAL KEEPER: "I am a goal-oriented person," says Bradford Berk '81M (MD/PhD) of his recovery from a spinal cord injury and of his return as CEO of the Medical Center. "There are huge opportunities for us as an academic institution and as a health care organization" (Story, page 6).



UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

Berk Returns to Lead Medical Center

“We can really do something unique, and I am very excited about that,” says Bradford Berk ’81M (MD/PhD) as he maps out new goals for himself and for the Medical Center.

By Michael Wentzel

He doesn't say he beat the odds. He says he met a goal.

Either way, Bradford Berk '81M (MD/PhD) returned March 1 from a serious injury—a cervical fracture and severe spinal cord injury—to assume full-time responsibilities as CEO of the Medical Center and the University's senior vice president for health science.

“This is like climbing Mt. Everest. It is reaching a goal,” Berk says. “I am a goal-oriented person. I set goals. When you achieve your goals, it is exhilarating. Coming back and seeing the people in the Medical Center has given me so much energy. We have much to work on and there are huge opportunities for us as an academic institution and a health care organization.”

Berk has set new goals: to move ahead with Medical Center projects, to implement changes at the Medical Center based on what he has learned as a patient, and to work as hard as possible in rehabilitation so he can make maximum gains physically.

“The accident is a terrible thing but it opened up my eyes to a lot of other areas where we can really do something unique and I am very excited about that,” he says. “Part of what drove me to come back was the opportunity to take advantage of my personal experiences as a patient. I want to take the positives that I saw as a patient and make them happen routinely at the Medical Center, and I want to make sure the negatives don't happen.”

President Joel Seligman announced Berk's return during a January ceremony in Flaum Atrium at the Medical Center in front of an overflow audience that welcomed Berk with several standing ovations.

“Brad is one of the most determined, most talented, most focused individuals I've ever met,” Seligman said during the event. “We've all been the beneficiaries of his remarkable vision for the Medical Center, and we know that with his leadership and that of the Medical Center's leadership team, we are poised for even greater progress in the future.”



As Berk returned to his position, Mark Taubman, who served as the Medical Center's acting CEO, became the 10th dean of the School of Medicine and Dentistry.

“We have a new dean, which is great. We're recruiting several new chairs. I am looking forward to the change in the Medical Center's senior leadership,” Berk says. “We have exciting plans for our Eastman Institute for Oral Health and our School of Nursing. Our goal is to integrate those schools successfully into our strategic plan.”

▲ **COMPONENTS OF CARE:** Berk says his experience has convinced him that Medical Center caregivers should emphasize four key components in their work: quality, safety, care, and courage.

Berk also returned to what he calls “a very difficult budget situation.”

“The recession has left the economy in a shambles and it will take a while to grow the economy,” he says. “Upstate New York and much of the country has more people who are unemployed and more uninsured individuals. California is the only state whose government is in worse shape fiscally than New York's. It is a very challenging environment.”

The key question for Berk: How does the Medical Center move forward when dollars are tight?

“We've trimmed expenses. We've improved our operation. We're stronger and more competitive. We've found new approaches to projects. The Clinical and

Translational Science Building is rising before our eyes. We are going ahead with our expansion of clinical beds. We will move forward," he says.

Berk, an accomplished cyclist, was injured May 30, 2009, during a ride in the hills near his house on Canandaigua Lake in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York. A car forced him to swing wide and leave the paved road. When he got off the road, a tire blew out and he went over the handlebars of his bicycle. He heard the crack of his neck and he felt his body go numb.

"Knowing what I had done, at that moment I told myself, if I got through this and afterwards if I did not need a ventilator but I was able to move in a wheelchair on my own, that would be okay," he says.

Berk underwent surgery to stabilize his neck at the Medical Center. He spent 20 days on a ventilator, and a total of 101 days at the Kessler Institute in New Jersey, which specializes in spinal cord injuries.

"I have encountered so many wonderful caregivers," he says. "If something felt really good, I would tell them that I really appreciated their taking extra time. That

interaction, that communication, really makes job satisfaction much better for the caregiver. We need to change our dynamic and make sure that there is time for the interaction to occur. I hope we can find ways to legitimize this as part of the way we operate."

When he returned to Rochester from New Jersey in September, Berk began working on Medical Center projects but devoted his afternoons to rehabilitation therapy.


While he continues to use a motorized wheelchair, Berk has made remarkable progress. He can stand, do squats, and walk with assistance. He can feed himself. He can brush his teeth. His left arm has recovered more strength and flexibility than the right. As of this winter, he couldn't transfer from his chair to a bed, but he expected to be able to do that when he builds up strength in both arms.

Only minimal sensation has returned. His right side has much more sensation than his left, but he describes the sensation as "patchy and not normal." By touch alone, he can't tell the difference between fabrics—between a terrycloth towel and

smooth cotton pants. His stamina has returned, and he keeps a very busy schedule.

"There's a lot of progress, but it's always too slow," Berk says. "As long you continue to progress, you have to keep pushing ahead. I am counting on continuing to progress."

Berk wants to apply his personal experiences as a patient to improve clinical care at the Medical Center through "quality, safety, care, and courage."

"It is a great opportunity to make this an even better place for patients and providers," Berk says. "That's a key message: I'm not just doing this for patients but also for providers—not just for those who have direct contact with patients but for everyone who works here. Everyone who works here is part of a health care organization and they are here in part because they want to do good for people. So we should be able to improve job satisfaction across the whole institution. That's the caring part. It's as much about caring for each other as it is about caring for our patients." 

Michael Wentzel is the editor of Rochester Medicine.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY

Mark Taubman Becomes Dean

The former chair of the Department of Medicine who served as acting CEO of the Medical Center for nine months is the new dean of the School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Mark Taubman, who came to the Medical Center as chief of the cardiology unit in 2003, is the school's 10th dean. Effective March 1, the appointment follows this winter's announcement that Bradford Berk '81M (MD/PhD) is returning as CEO of the Medical Center after suffering a serious spinal cord injury last spring.

"Mark is the best possible choice for dean," Berk said of Taubman's appointment. "He is a physician-scientist who is active in the laboratory yet possesses a broad institutional view. As an active cardiologist, he also understands the challenges of practicing medicine."

As chief of cardiology, Taubman was the guiding force behind the expansion of cardiac patient care services, faculty recruitment, strengthening treatments for those with heart arrhythmias and heart failure, adding new preventive cardiology programs, such as the women's heart program, and forging strong regional services. Taubman



DEAN: A noted cardiologist and medical education leader, Taubman is the 10th dean of the medical school.

also served as director of the Aab Cardiovascular Research Institute, which he helped Berk to found.

Taubman became chair of the Department of Medicine and the Charles E. Dewey Professor of Medicine in May 2007. As chair, he directed the Medical Center's largest single department, overseeing a \$150 million budget and more than 1,000 faculty

and staff in 10 units devoted to patient care, research, and education. He named division chiefs, including general medicine, cardiology, hematology-oncology, endocrinology, and infectious disease.

In 2006, Taubman was named editor-in-chief of *Arteriosclerosis, Thrombosis and Vascular Biology*, one of five international medical journals published by the American Heart Association, and the leading journal in the field of vascular biology.

A graduate of New York University's medical school, he interned at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital before completing his residency and cardiology fellowship training at the Brigham & Women's Hospital. Taubman has held academic appointments at Harvard Medical School, Children's Hospital Boston, and Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. Prior to being recruited to Rochester, he was director of cardiovascular research at Mt. Sinai.

Elizabeth McAnarney, the chair emerita of pediatrics, served as interim dean since June, when former dean David Guzick became senior vice president for health affairs at the University of Florida and president of the University of Florida health system.