

Developing Ideas

DR. SCOTT DULCHAVSKY NURTURES CULTURE OF INNOVATION AT HENRY FORD HOSPITAL



Scott Dulchavsky

Just three short years ago, the building that now houses the Henry Ford Innovation Institute at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit was a space used for patient finance, decked with low-hanging ceilings and employees working in drab cubicles. Fast-forward to 2015, and the building situated at the center of the Clara Ford Pavilion is a space defined by creativity and inventive thinking.

It's a place where you'll find a twirling light fixture in the shape of a DNA strand hanging from the ceiling, and an "innovation cube" conference room in the center of the space, where you can write ideas on the table and walls. It's a place where it's not uncommon to see the hardcover book *Space: The Ultimate Frontier* by Michael Sharpe situated on a glass coffee table near a photograph of Hart Plaza's Pylon sculpture by artist Chris Lopez, entitled "The Sky is the Limit," or even red countertops made from shattered tail lights.

And it's a place created out of the frustration and motivation of Dr. Scott Dulchavsky, who now heads the Innovation Institute as the organization's CEO. "It's frustrating to be one of those creative people – to have an ideation he thinks has got some financial merit or improvement in care or other things – and having to work through the intricacies of getting that along the stages of innovation when the organization is not built for that," Dulchavsky explains. "There are 30,000 creative

minds here at Henry Ford, and I thought it was a really untapped resource for innovation."

Dulchavsky also gives credit to Henry Ford Health System CEO Nancy Schlichting, acknowledging her own like-mindedness in terms of entrepreneurship. "When I approached the subject (of the Innovation Institute) with her, she said, 'Full speed ahead,'" he recalls.

The institute has already been a tremendous success with inventions like the Model G hospital gown, which is saving patients from those embarrassing, drafty backsides evident in older designs, and myriad new ideas for solving problems of today and tomorrow with the organization's innovation challenges.

"I think there's a huge opportunity in health care to really look at how we do things and do them differently," says Dulchavsky, who is also chair of surgery at Henry Ford Hospital. "The hospital gown is a great example. We've been having patients walk around with their behinds hanging out for 100 years."

Dulchavsky stresses the importance of bringing dissimilar people together. "The real power of innovation is getting people from different walks of life together to try and solve a common problem – a big, wicked problem, as we say," he says. "Innovation is critical to virtually any industry, and some would say it's a critical component of life."


That type of thinking and problem solving is also discernible in Dulchavsky's work with NASA, where he's a principal investigator for the agency and the National Space Biomedical Research Institute in Houston to help provide medical care to astronauts. There, Dulchavsky and his team have been exploring telemedicine – specifically, whether doctors can teach non-doctors effectively and efficiently to do basic medical procedures in space or remote areas, and whether they can advance medical care capabilities off the planet.

"With the advent of the Internet and higher connection speeds, I can be sitting in a Starbucks and taking care of an astronaut orbiting the planet at 18,000 miles an hour, or taking care of an injured mountain climber at 23,000 feet in Nepal from the comfort of my office," Dulchavsky explains.

He and his team have also taught ultrasound to the astronaut and cosmonaut crews aboard the International Space Station to use for medical emergencies. This specific work has been modified for use on Earth, where Dulchavsky's team supports the on-site care of professional sports teams, U.S. Olympic Committee athletes, and the Olympic Games.

And as a professor of surgery, molecular biology and genetics at Wayne State University's School of Medicine, Dulchavsky is making sure that the surgeons of tomorrow get a glimpse of the incredible innovations taking place at the institute. "I had a bunch of medical school ducklings up here yesterday, and I'll have some more tomorrow," he says, noting that students nowadays are considerably more prepared in terms of effectively communicating with patients.

In the doctor and CEO's spare time – when he has spare time, that is – he enjoys playing ice hockey as the goalie, facing pucks at a high speed. But Dulchavsky is completely dedicated to the work being done at Henry Ford Health System, especially at the Detroit campus.

"My aspirational goal is to be a part of the technology infrastructure that is growing in Detroit. You can feel it. It's palpable," he says. "You look in Midtown and in our region, and you can feel that we've gone through the winter storm, and flowers are starting to bloom. I want to be part of that story here."  — Audrey LaForest