Masters comprise a small group of highly distinguished physicians, selected from among Fellows, who have achieved recognition in medicine by exhibiting preeminence in practice or medical research, holding positions of high honor, or making significant contributions to medical science or the art of medicine. Masters must be highly accomplished individuals. Evidence of their achievements can come from many types of endeavors, such as research, education, health care initiatives, volunteerism, and administrative positions. The Master must be distinguished by the excellence and significance of his or her contributions to the field of medicine.

David J. Gullen, MD, MACP

Born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, David J. Gullen began his college education at Princeton University. After earning his masters degree at Arizona State University and his MD at the University of Arizona, College of Medicine in Tucson, Dr. Gullen did his internship and residency at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester, New York following it up with a fellowship in Medical-Psychiatric Liaison also at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Today, Dr. Gullen is the Co-Director of the Faculty Communication Skills Course and the Co-Director of the Resident and Fellows Communication Skills Course at Mayo Clinic Arizona in Scottsdale.

Dr. Gullen has received numerous awards over the course of his career. He was twice awarded the Attending Physician of the Year Award for Outstanding Teacher in Internal Medicine from St. Joseph’s Hospital and Medical Center and the Laureate Award from the Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians. In 2008, he received the White Coat Lecturer award from the University of Arizona.

Dr. Gullen is also an active member in various professional societies. In addition, he served as the Chair on the Board of Regents and later as President of the American Society of Internal Medicine. He has held several positions in the American College of Physicians including Chair on the Board of Regents. He served as Governor of the Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians from 1989 to 1994. Currently, Dr. Gullen chairs the Board of Directors of the Flinn Foundation.

**Arizona Chapter, American College of Physicians:** I’d like to start by having you speak a little bit about your career -- how did you originally become interested in pursuing medicine?

**David J. Gullen:** My father was an OB/Gyn doctor and seeing what he did intrigued me. While it interested me, I wanted to be sure that was choosing it not because he did it but because I wanted to. So as I was going through college I took pre-med courses but I also took courses in philosophy and psychology. Then I decided that being a doctor would combine the scientific world with the personal world.

When I started thinking about careers that would provide a lifetime of interest, challenge and growth, for me medicine was at the top of the list. I wasn’t interested in being a pure scientist; while that is a
great field it just wasn’t for my strength. I was more interested in applying science and knowledge to helping people.

**ACP-AZ: And what are some of the different settings in which you’ve practiced medicine? How did you get where you are today?**

**DJG:** I started out after I finished my residency at the University of Rochester I joined a five person practice called Phoenix Medical Associates. It was founded by one of our early ACP Governors, Ashton Taylor and ACP Laureate winner, Donald Buffmire. We had a very traditional 6 person group practice near St. Joseph’s hospital but also admitted to Banner Good Samaritan and St. Luke’s hospitals. We were active in their teaching programs as well for many years.

In 1997 Mayo Clinic approached us and wanted to establish a network of primary care practices so we worked out an arrangement where we sold our practice to them but stayed in our same location. In April 2004 we moved to the Mayo campus on 134th Street and Shea Boulevard.

So, I’ve gone from a very traditional private practice to being part of an integrated multi-specialty group but still doing primary care internal medicine and active in teaching. One thing I’ve been doing more of is teaching patient/physician communication skills.

**ACP-AZ: How long have you been a member of the American College of Physicians?**

**DJG:** I joined the ACP as a Resident in 1976 and became a Fellow in 1987. In 2001 I became a Master of the College as I was completing my term as Chair for the Board of Regents.

**ACP-AZ: Why did you originally decide to join the ACP and why have you remained a member throughout the years?**

**DJG:** When I was a Resident it was because they produced the Annals of Internal Medicine and my Program Director and the faculty at the University of Rochester were very positive about the ACP. Between what they had to say and what I read from the ACP I thought it was an excellent organization dedicated to the highest principles of the profession. I always felt very proud of what I would read and excited by the high ideals and the focus on education and clinical excellence.

And then when I was out in practice the ACP provided a sort of academic home for those of us who were in full-time clinical practice. So even though I was on the teaching faculty at St. Joseph’s and received two Teacher of the Year awards the ACP provided the professional and academic support that I might have gotten if I were part of an academic faculty, say at the medical school.

**ACP-AZ: What are some of your proudest academic or professional achievements?**

**DJG:** Fellowship in the ACP and Mastership, being Governor of the Arizona Chapter of the American College of Physicians and being on the Board of Regents of the College, and of all the activities I participated in, Chairing the Board of Regents were the highlights. And then also being on the Board of Internal Medicine and serving there as the Secretary/Treasurer. Currently I’ve become a faculty member of the American Academy on Communication and Healthcare which is a group dedicated to promoting relationship centered care. It’s a wonderful group with a different but complimentary focus with the ACP.

**ACP-AZ: How do you maintain a healthy balance between work and the rest of your life?**

**DJG:** Although my children are grown, I’ve always tried to participate in their activities such as going to their games. I’ve always been a regular exerciser, I like the outdoors, I like music, and I like to read a lot, so I try to have a lot of interests that keep me stimulated and compliment medicine. Also trying
to have a spiritual practice or spiritual life to help deal with the emotional challenges we experience as physicians.

The biggest anchor in my life has been my family, especially my wife.

Medicine is a juggling act. It consumes a lot of time, energy, and emotion. You have to work at staying balanced - some days feel more balanced than others.

ACP-AZ: What are some of the challenges that you think the current health care system is facing, on the state or local level?

DJG: The rate of increasing costs is significant. We need to figure a way to incorporate new discoveries without having costs go up so greatly.

Trying to understand how to reorganize practice in order to provide chronic care and also to support primary care because the interest has decreased so dramatically, is another. So far there have been some good proposals but the ones that have been enacted haven’t worked. We still don’t have people going into primary care.

And then, trying a way to get universal coverage in a way that’s financially affordable.

ACP-AZ: What advice would you give to our physicians in training?

DJG: Be patient and relationship centered. Work with teachers and colleagues to develop the skills to learn how to relate well with patients as human beings. That will help to sustain interest and joy in medicine for a lifetime. Because those relationships with patients as people, even if the medical problems the patients have are not unusual or you’ve seen it before, the fact that they belong to people whom you know and with whom you have a relationship makes them important problems and it’s very satisfying to help patients with them.

Trying to maintain good work/life balance is critical. That has to be worked at and be thoughtful of priorities. Holding to the very high ideals sometimes makes it a little chaotic. Go back to the Fellows Oath of the ACP, the Hippocratic Oath, and all these things are good center points.

The kind of work we do is very emotionally challenging and embracing that to some degree and learning from those emotional challenges really helps us grow as human beings. It’s sort of the old Marcus Welby ideal, whether it was a myth or reality. As physicians, because we participate so intimately in patients’ lives we can gain a lot of wisdom and learning from our patients.

ACP-AZ: Dr. Gullen, thank you for taking the time to correspond with us!