

Scholarships fuel success at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine

Some people might be surprised to hear that 100 percent of a new medical school's first class of students passed step one of the United States Medical Licensing Examination, especially when many highly renowned schools did not achieve a perfect pass-rate this year.

When Jim Smith, of Roanoke, Va., heard the good news about students at the Virginia Tech Carilion (VTC) School of Medicine, located in his city, he was pleased, but not shocked.

"If you look at the makeup of people involved in this school and at [medical school] Dean Cynda Johnson and her team, you have

probably the most talented group of people that I've ever worked with," said Smith (sociology '74), a senior-housing developer and operator who heads the medical school's board of directors, has donated generously in support of the school, and has been involved in it since its inception. "You're predisposed to think everything is going to work and you will be successful, but I was still very proud and happy."

Aspiring doctors have to pass the three-step licensing exam, often called the board exam, before they can apply for a medical license.

Yi Deng, a member of the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine's charter class, with the school's dean, Cynda Johnson.

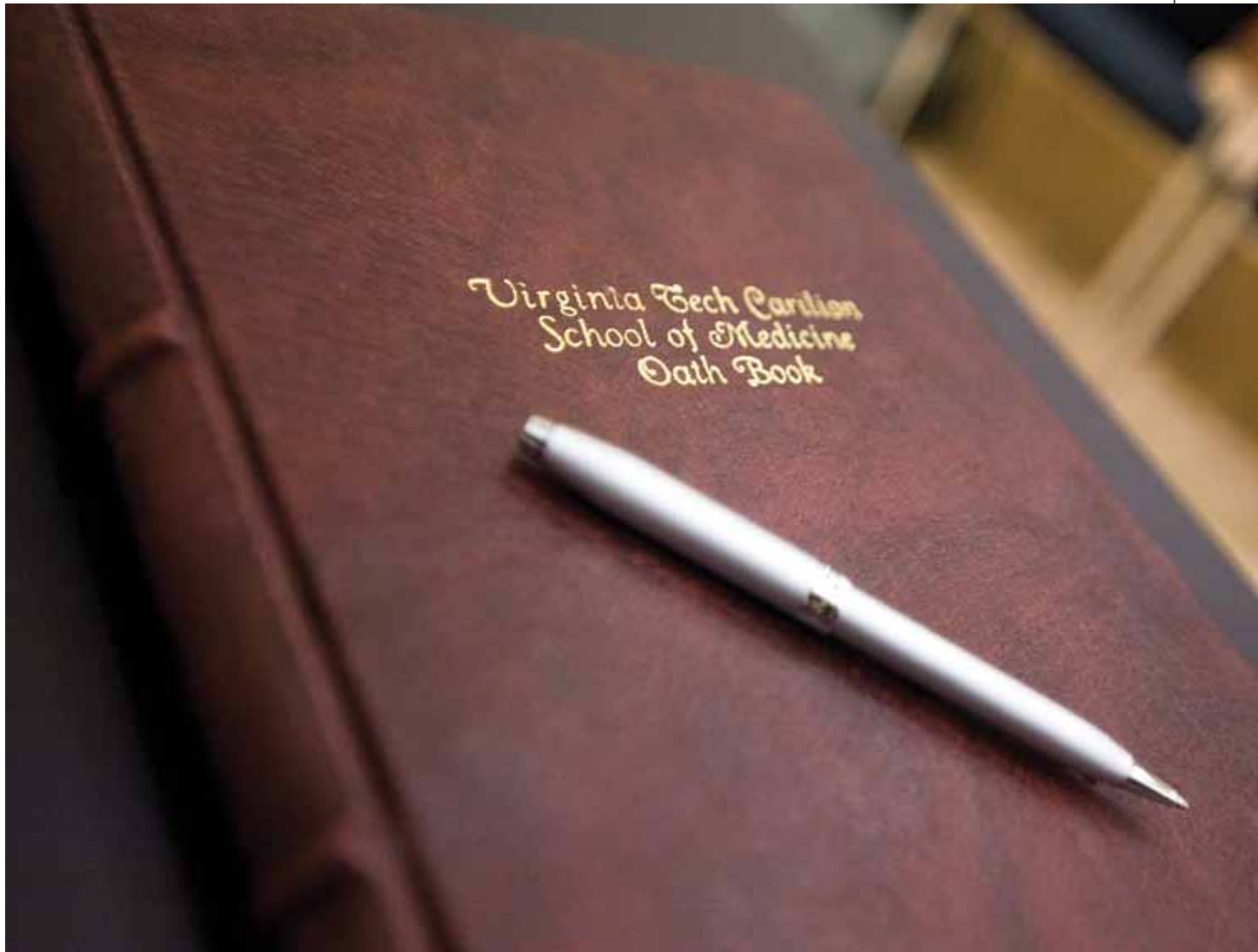
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Step one is a one-day, multiple-choice test of knowledge of basic medical sciences. The test is generally administered after the second year of medical school. Step-two tests are usually taken in the fourth year of medical school, and step-three ones are generally taken during internships.

Not only did all 42 of the school's students who took the examination this year pass, a vast majority of them scored above the national average.

"It's a validation of the strength of the school and the curriculum, because it's our first national benchmark," said Johnson. "And board



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exam scores are the single best factor that ensures medical school students get into top residency programs.”

Johnson said one factor in the school’s excellent testing result was the decision to use scholarships to recruit an extremely high caliber of student for the charter class that arrived in fall 2010.

“As a new school, we’re developing our brand and need to be able to recruit these students,” Johnson explained. “We have a high-end curriculum. We want to develop physician thought leaders, and want to be able to recruit against the Ivy League and other top schools. Those schools get the best students due to their reputations, but also with scholarships.”

More online

Scholarships are one way that donors have helped the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. Program support is another. To learn how Delta Dental of Virginia’s generosity helped the school pilot an oral-health curriculum, visit <http://bit.ly/vtc-oral-health>.

Gifts by donors like Dan Carusillo help make it possible for the VTC School of Medicine to use scholarships to recruit. He is an anesthesiologist who earned his medical degree from Georgetown but said “Virginia Tech is really my alma mater in my mind,” due to

his unforgettable experiences in Blacksburg while working toward the bachelor’s of biological sciences he earned in 1986.

When Carusillo and his wife, Katina (systems engineering ’87), learned of Virginia Tech’s plans to establish a medical school in partnership with Carilion Clinic, they were inspired to create an endowment to fund scholarships at the school.

“It’s pretty impressive for a new program to really hit the ground running and come up to speed so quickly,” Carusillo, of San Diego, Calif., said in reference to the testing result. “I was impressed and I was proud, but to be honest I was not surprised because I think the world of how that program is set up.”

Priscilla McCall, of Greensboro, N.C., created the McCall VTC School of Medicine Scholarship Endowment along with her husband, Sam, a member of Virginia Tech’s Class of 1958.

“I am so pleased that has happened,” she said of the test results, “but with the caliber of people that they have, I would expect nothing less.”

Carusillo said news of the school’s step-one examination success should come as no surprise to those who have been following its progress, and he hopes it will draw even more attention to the school and result in additional philanthropic support.

“I wish more physicians and scientists in general could really get exposed to what they’re doing out there,” he said of the school. “It’s exciting and motivating, and I truly think people could get caught up in it. I’d like to put out a challenge to any other physicians with a Virginia Tech loyalty to sponsor a scholarship, because all of us in the medical field owe a debt to the field and should pay it forward.”