

‘From Good to Great’

A Tribute to the Visionary Leadership Behind WMJ’s Transformation

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A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way,” wrote John C. Maxwell. These words capture the essence of true leadership: vision in thought, courage in action, and generosity in example. Two leaders who embody these characteristics are Robert N. Golden, MD, and Joseph E. Kerschner, MD, who have each profoundly shaped the landscape of medical education and public health in Wisconsin as deans of their respective institutions.

Myriad Achievements

Golden, who became the ninth dean of the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health and vice chancellor for medical affairs at UW–Madison in 2006, led the school for nearly two decades, making him one of the longest-serving medical school deans in the country. He is a nationally recognized psychiatrist and medical educator whose remarkable career includes 21 years at the University of North Carolina prior to his arrival at UW–Madison, shortly after the UW Medical School had changed its name to the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. Since then, he guided the school through a profound transformation marked by the integration of public health into the core of medical training and a renewed focus on health equity and community partnerships that included establishment of a Preventive Medicine Residency Program, significantly expanding the Master of Public Health Program, and the creation of

the Wisconsin Academy for Rural Medicine and Training in Urban Medicine and Public Health Program. He also oversaw significant increases in National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding and the expansion of translational research,

as CEO of Children’s Specialty Group, Kerschner was appointed dean in 2011 and assumed the additional role of provost in 2017. Under his leadership, MCW experienced more than a decade of strategic growth in medical education, research,

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—Jonathan L. Temte, MD, PhD

including the launch of the Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, among many other notable achievements.

“We are deeply indebted to Dean Golden for his many incredible years of service to our students and for all his leadership in service to the health of our state’s residents,” said UW–Madison Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin, JD, PhD, in a 2024 article in *Quarterly* magazine (Volume 26, Issue 4). “His tireless dedication embodies the Wisconsin Idea and innovation for the public good. He has worked hard across almost two decades to strengthen health care in every county in Wisconsin, and it shows.”

Meanwhile, Kerschner, a pediatric otolaryngologist and accomplished physician-scientist, brought a similarly transformative approach to the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW). An MCW faculty member since 1998 who also served

and community engagement. The school of medicine expanded to include regional medical campuses in Green Bay and Central Wisconsin to address physician shortages in underserved areas, and MCW’s graduate medical education program also expanded to include new training positions for psychiatry and behavioral health, as well as a new residency program in family and community medicine. At the same time, the school’s NIH funding has nearly doubled, and advances in cutting-edge biomedical research initiatives include the formation of a new Data Science Institute and the development of several new centers of research excellence. Known for his clear communication and ability to unite academic and clinical missions, Kerschner championed initiatives that elevated the role of science, training, and public service in Wisconsin’s health ecosystem.



John R. Raymond, Sr., MD, and Joseph E. Kerschner, MD

“Dr. Kerschner has been a trusted thought leader and partner,” said John R. Raymond, Sr., MD, MCW president and CEO, in an article published in the fall 2024 issue of *MCW Magazine*. “He has brought an infectious enthusiasm, energy, and work ethic to his many roles at MCW. He has helped to elevate MCW’s missions, support our people, enhance our visibility—throughout the state, country and globally—and enrich our partnerships across multiple venues and entities.”

Golden and Kerschner recently concluded their tenure as deans, and while their accomplishments have many parallels, perhaps one of their most unifying achievements is the joint stewardship and long-term preservation of the *Wisconsin Medical Journal (WMJ)*—a legacy that reflects their enduring vision for medicine in Wisconsin.

WMJ’s Transformation

Founded in 1903, the *WMJ* has served for more than a century as a platform for disseminating medical and public health scholarship in Wisconsin. Initially published by the Wisconsin Medical Society (Society), the journal reflected the voices of practicing clinicians and researchers alike. But by the late 2010s, the journal’s future was uncertain, as mount-

ing financial pressures threatened its sustainability.

According to John J. Frey, III, MD, emeritus professor and former chair of the UW School of Medicine and Public Health Department of Family Medicine, the Society approached the medical schools—whose faculty and learners authored much of the research published in *WMJ*—about sponsorship.

“Thanks to a high level of cooperation, understanding and support, Deans Golden and Kerschner and MCW President John Raymond came together to assure the future of the journal—not just as sponsors, but as co-owners and publishers,” said Frey, who served as *WMJ* editor-in-chief from 2006 to 2019. “Their leadership not only preserved the journal as a cornerstone of academic and clinical scholarship but strengthened its role as a shared platform serving faculty, learners, and practicing health care professionals across Wisconsin and the region.”

Golden recalled how the collaboration came to fruition. “John Raymond, the president of MCW and I have enjoyed a wonderful partnership from the very start of his leadership role at MCW and got together for periodic lunches during which we would discuss potential projects of mutual interest. I think it was over one of those lunches that we created a vision of



Robert N. Golden, MD

taking the *WMJ* off the hands of the Society and having the two schools run it together. This would allow the journal to have a stronger academic focus, enjoy greater stability, and create opportunities for the faculty and students at the schools to get more engaged with the journal.”

An agreement was reached, and *WMJ* moved to its new institutional home in 2019.

“The past six years have demonstrated the success of this model, as the journal continues to receive high quality submissions and has sustained its 100-plus year tradition of serving the public health and health care needs of Wisconsin,” said Patrick L. Remington, MD, MPH, Professor Emeritus of Population Health Sciences at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health. As the UW School of Medicine and Public Health’s liaison to the Society in 2019, Remington was instrumental in *WMJ*’s transition from the Society to the schools.

A Publishing Board was then created to oversee operations, including finances and appointment of the editor-in-chief and deputy editors, which alternate between the two schools. The Board comprises three members from each school appointed by their respective deans, as well as an ex officio member representing the Society.

Sarina Schrager, MD, MS, professor of fam-

ily medicine at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, served as editor-in-chief throughout the transition until 2022, when she became editor-in-chief of *Family Medicine*, the official journal of the Society of Teachers of Family Medicine. “The process of developing a joint publishing model in a collaborative and cooperative manner is a testament to their (the deans) strong leadership,” said Schrager. “Dean Golden was a staunch proponent of the new publication model and providing staff support for the editorial process, and both deans encouraged faculty to submit papers and contributed columns to each issue.” Kerschner also frequently spotlighted *WMJ* in his weekly internal communication with the MCW community.

What has emerged was more than a rescue—it was a renaissance. Since 2019, annual submissions to the journal have more than doubled, reflecting a renewed trust and enthusiasm from researchers, clinicians, and trainees across the state. In the past year alone, the *WMJ* published 137 papers, compared to just 39 in 2019—an achievement that speaks not only to growth in volume, but to the journal’s role as a platform for regional scholarship.

“The access to a strong peer-reviewed journal is essential for scholars to communicate their findings and to develop junior authors, including students and residents, while being able to share current research improves health care practices across the state,” said William Hueston, MD, who served as inaugural chair of the *WMJ* Publishing Board and was associate provost for education, senior associate dean for medical education and a professor in the department of family and community medicine at MCW prior to his retirement. “Supporting the *WMJ* was an obvious win-win for both the academic institutions and the practicing physicians in the state of Wisconsin.”

Kerschner agrees. “The *Wisconsin Medical Journal* is an outstanding peer-review journal, and I was extremely happy to support this as dean of the school of medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin,” he said. “It provides an outstanding platform—especially for those early in their academic careers—to publish excellent work and especially work that is relevant to medicine in Wisconsin.”

Since the transition, the journal has also

undergone a comprehensive modernization: its editorial processes were streamlined, digital accessibility was improved, and the introduction of an annual themed issue allows the journal to address timely and locally resonant topics, from rural health equity to mental health access.

“The success of the journal has been spectacular,” Golden agreed. “It has moved from ‘good to great,’ with high quality articles, modernization of its presentation and processes,

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and strong engagement from faculty at both organizations. The theme issues have been wonderfully relevant and timely, and the articles are consistently interesting and well written.

“I feel this is one example of how Wisconsin’s two medical programs have worked together to advance a shared vision of service to the state’s physicians and the populations and patients they care for,” Golden added.

Equally important has been the journal’s role in mentoring the next generation of academic voices. *WMJ* is an accessible venue for original research, reflective essays, and thought leadership for faculty, fellows, residents, and medical students—many who publish for the first time in its pages. And it also has become a valuable training ground for editorial fellows and junior reviewers, reinforcing its mission not just to publish knowledge, but to cultivate it.

Jonathan L. Temte, MD, PhD, UW School of Medicine and Public Health associate dean for public health and community engagement, has witnessed the journal’s evolution firsthand, as past chair and current member of the Publishing Board, as well as an author and reviewer.

“The *WMJ* is a palpable extension of the Wisconsin Idea. The journal serves as a dependable, high-quality, high-integrity publication that accepts submissions without fees,” said Temte. “This shared journal is a commitment to the medical and public health enter-

prises of both schools and represents a true collaboration for education, research, equity, and outreach, and commitment to the ‘sifting and winnowing’ of information and ideas.”

Through their collaboration, Golden and Kerschner demonstrated how academic leadership can transcend boundaries in service of the public good, and together, their leadership has left a legacy that will ensure that the benefits of academic medicine extend to every cor-

ner of the state—something that undoubtedly will continue during the next phase of their careers. Golden, emeritus dean of the School of Medicine and Public Health, emeritus vice chancellor for medical affairs at UW–Madison, and a professor in the Department of Psychiatry, will shift his focus to mentoring faculty members and trainees. Kerschner, dean emeritus of the MCW School of Medicine, will begin a new journey as CEO of one of his research start-up companies (OtoNano, LLC) and as a consultant for Chartis Consulting. Meanwhile, the *WMJ* continues to grow as a resource for clinicians, educators, and public health professionals across the state and beyond, and it does so on a foundation laid by leaders who transformed uncertainty into opportunity by reimagining what a regional medical journal could be.

“In a time of competition between health systems, this collaborative model is a testament to the leadership of Deans Golden and Kerschner,” said Remington, whose involvement with *WMJ* dates back to medical school and has continued throughout his career. “It is truly a win-win-win, for the School of Medicine and Public Health, the Medical College of Wisconsin, and the State of Wisconsin. The goals of the journal align perfectly with the goals of each medical school—in research, education, and community service. It is truly a model of the Wisconsin Idea.”

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WMJ

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