



## DR. DANIEL LEDBETTER REMEMBRANCE

DR. JOHN WALDHAUSEN, PROFESSOR, DIVISION CHIEF, PEDIATRIC GENERAL SURGERY

**D**r. Daniel J. Ledbetter was born May 5, 1956 in Missouri. He was raised with his two sisters Fern and Floyd in Orlando, Florida. He was inspired by his namesake, Dr. Daniel Wisely, to pursue a career in surgery and obtained both his undergraduate and medical degrees from the University of Florida, making him a lifelong Gator fan. Dan played soccer (the real football) for the University and could always be seen in the OR at Children's wearing his University of Florida-colored OR shoes or posting the world cup tournament results sheet on his office door.

Dan went to the University of Washington (UW) for general surgery residency from 1981–1986 under James Carrico. He spent two years doing research and being trauma doc at Harborview and flight physician for Airlift Northwest. He subsequently trained at Seattle Children's Hospital (SCH) under David Tapper in Pediatric Surgery, from 1989–1991. Dan became triple boarded in general surgery, pediatric surgery and critical care. During residency, Dan met his future wife of 35 years, Sunny Juul. Sunny was a pediatrics resident at the time and went on to become division chief of neonatology at UW. They married on February 29, 1984 and had two children, Kelly, who is now chief resident in plastic surgery at UW, and Brian, who trained in law and is a software engineer at Getty Images. Dan was devoted to his family and was a caring and loving father and husband. In addition to world cup soccer he had a passion for golfing rain or shine, weekend walks at Marymoor Park with his golden retrievers,

wine tasting and non-fiction. At our annual division holiday party, he could usually be found toward the end of the gathering sampling a rare or expensive bottle from our host's cellar.

After completion of his training, Dan went first to Wyler Children's Hospital in Chicago for two years and then back to his home state at the Shands Hospital, University of Florida in Gainesville. In 2000, both SCH and the UW were extremely fortunate to recruit both Sunny and Dan back to Washington where they have been the rest of their careers. Dan became a professor of surgery in the department in 2015. As a faculty member at SCH, Dan led our efforts in the standardization of care for appendicitis and congenital diaphragmatic hernia. He spent countless hours developing multi-disciplinary protocols that have improved the care for children with these and other

Surgery–Pulmonary Follow Up clinic, one of the first clinics in the US specifically devoted to long term follow-up of babies with congenital diaphragmatic hernia. Dan was the go-to person in our division for all critical care problems and was perhaps the best-read surgeon most of us had ever met, always up to date on the latest articles or management strategies. Dan also had an interest in endocrine and thyroid surgery and wrote articles and a co-edited a text book on these topics in the pediatric patient. In February 2019, Dan and Sunny were traveling in Thailand visiting Angkor Wat, riding elephants, taking cooking classes and enjoying each-others company when Dan suffered a massive stroke and passed away quickly on February 27.

Dan will be remembered by his students, residents and fellows as a patient, quiet and exceptional teacher. His residents always



The two Dr. Ledbetters enjoying time together between cases at Seattle Children's Hospital, 2018

# Surgery News

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process the information rather than coming to a rash decision. Dan cared about those whom he taught and would send faculty, students, residents, and fellows current or classic articles that he thought we all should know about, often with handwritten commentary. He kept this up for many, long after they had graduated from the program. He even sent along non-medical articles he'd seen in papers or magazines regarding people's individual interests outside of medicine. Dan didn't just know his colleagues as physicians. He knew about us as friends.

Dan devoted a significant amount of his time to teaching the next generation of medical students as part of the School of Medicine faculty, Big Sky College where he taught and mentored second year medical students. He served on numerous committees at both the Universities of Florida and Washington regarding student and resident education. Dan was a stalwart for the pediatric surgery fellowship and could be counted on to be at teaching conferences and to impart sage commentary on complex clinical problems. One of our fellows likened Dan to skiing when your edges are on the right track and your path is straight and true. Dan was an outstanding surgeon, clinically and technically. Despite his years and experience he never shied from asking for other's opinions or help, setting an example for others to work as a team and provide the best patient care possible. Hundreds of children are alive, and many thousands are better off because of the care Dan provided them.

Dan's contributions to education were recognized not only on the local but the national stage as well. He served the American Board of Surgery writing questions for both the general and pediatric surgery in-training examinations. He was also selected to be an oral board examiner for the Pediatric Surgery Board.



Dan Ledbetter and his wife Sunny enjoying a break on their hiking vacation in Zion National Park in 2017

In 2016 Dan was selected as a runner up for the Association of American Medical Colleges, Arnold P. Gold Foundation Humanism in Medicine Award. This goes to one physician faculty member nationwide each year. Nominations comments said:

*“Dr. Ledbetter is the first doctor who has made me feel confident enough to be involved in making decisions at the bedside of a patient, he takes the time to be patient when asking for possible answers or ideas, and when they are wrong finds a way to still make me feel like I can try again next time.”*

*“Dr. Ledbetter has been the most important teacher I've had during my medical school education. He teaches us patient care while exemplifying great bedside manner. [He] creates a caring environment for us to develop our clinical medicine skills. He teaches us things no book can... how to talk to patients and how to do it well.”*

*“Dr. Ledbetter is a great mentor that creates a very safe space for learning and builds collaboration amongst his students. He is very knowledgeable and teaches by example, often pushing us so we can see how much we have learned. He provides very helpful feedback for improvement and helps us determine realistic goals to reach as we go through ICM2.”*

As a faculty member and colleague, Dan was exceptional. Whether one had been on faculty for 1 year or 30, Dan could be counted on for his wisdom and practical approach to problems. He was a team player and the best of partners. He would dependably tell it like it is and let leadership know if they were off base. He would often bring smiles to everyone's face when he would slap his hand on the table and say, “I'm not doing that!!” Then he'd often smile himself, and rather than coming off as obstructive, everyone knew Dan was standing up for what he thought was right or pointing out firmly that what he was hearing didn't make any sense. And as usual, he was right. He could also make us laugh, often making a pithy comment under his breath that only the person next to him could hear, leaving that person laughing out loud as he would quietly chuckle not revealing the cause of the mirth. Each of us in the division will miss him profoundly as a scholar, teacher, surgeon and most importantly as a friend and gifted human being. Dan represented the best in us; the kind and gentle nature that it takes to be a pediatric surgeon. Others might take his position, none will take his place.