Surgical ‘Boot Camp’ Simulation Helps Residents Improve Operating Room Skills

Program trains surgeons to perform under pressure in OR; focuses on improving patient care

CHICAGO—The Thoracic Surgery Directors Association (TSDA) is answering the call for improving the quality of patient care and safety with its simulation-based “Boot Camp” program, enabling cardiothoracic (CT) surgical residents to focus on technical skills and crisis management training outside of the operating room.

First-year CT surgical residents will participate in the intensive, 3-day course, to be held September 11-14 at The William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education in Chapel Hill, N.C. Faculty members will teach and assess residents’ skills in four primary areas of CT surgery as well as in management of rare catastrophic events so they are better prepared when facing these situations in the operating room.

Boot Camp Program Directors James I. Fann, MD, from Stanford University, Richard H. Feins, MD, from the University of North Carolina, and George L. Hicks Jr., MD, from the University of Rochester, developed the annual course in 2008 based on identified needs emerging in CT surgery residency programs. Each year the program focuses on the most current situations facing CT surgeons.

“Since its inception, our Boot Camp has focused on preparing our students for real-life situations in the operating room,” said Dr. Fann. “Our emphasis on a hands-on curriculum in basic cardiothoracic operating skills works to ensure that residents will be at peak performance when entering the OR and have the chance to experience some of the more rare conditions before seeing them in actual patients.”

During this year’s program, first-year cardiothoracic surgery residents will receive instruction in five specific CT surgical areas: small vessel anastomosis, cardiopulmonary bypass, lobectomy, and mediastinoscopy/bronchoscopy. The Boot Camp utilizes faculty surgeons, who monitor individual residents at every skills station and provide formative feedback following the simulation exercises. Faculty and resident assessment tools will be utilized throughout the program, providing valuable data during daily faculty debriefing sessions.

“Our curriculum changes every year to focus on the most current needs CT surgery, ensuring our residents receive training in the most relevant procedures and technology,” noted Dr. Feins. “It has been proven that residents who attend our program pass their board certification at high rates than residents who do not attend and are better prepared to move on to the next phase of their career.”

Media Contact:
Beth Winer
312-202-5855
bwiner@tsda.org

www.tsda.org
According to statistics released from the American Board of Thoracic Surgery, residents who participate in the Boot Camp simulation have lower fail rates for both the oral and written portions of board certification. Since 2009, residents who attended Boot Camp have an overall fail rate of 15.6% on the oral boards and a 13.2% fail rate on the written boards compared with a 32.6% fail rate on oral and 18.5% on written among residents who did not attend the simulation.

“CT surgery is constantly evolving to meet the needs of today’s patients,” said Dr. Hicks. “The training we provide in our Boot Camp program ensures that CT residents and surgeons have access to the latest techniques and equipment available, enabling them to provide the highest quality patient care.”

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For more information on the TSDA Boot Camp or other TSDA activities, contact Beth Winer, Executive Director, at bwiner@tsda.org or 312-202-5855.

About the Thoracic Surgery Directors Association  
The Thoracic Surgery Directors Association (TSDA) was established in 1978 as a membership organization for cardiothoracic surgery residency program directors. TSDA provides resources and networking opportunities for program directors and program coordinators, and supplemental curriculum materials and resources for general surgery and cardiothoracic surgery residents.