

John D. and Virginia Riesch Scholarship Endowment



John D. Riesch, MD

Virginia Riesch, RN

Doctor John Riesch performed the first lumpectomy in Wisconsin in 1979. He had worked alongside radiation oncologists trained in France, who were using the procedure successfully to avoid removing a woman's entire breast. With his characteristic enthusiasm for employing new knowledge, Dr. Riesch was anxious to share it. But even several years later, this alternative to mastectomy for women with early stage breast cancer still was not accepted in the medical community. In fact, in 1982, members of the Wisconsin State Surgical Society booed Dr. Riesch off the stage when he tried to promote the procedure.

Undeterred, he continued to follow the research and learn as much as he could, educating his colleagues along the way. Ultimately, his efforts spared thousands of women from disfigurement while still saving their lives.

A nurse who assisted Dr. Riesch also shared his passion for education. Virginia Riesch, BS, RN, was not only part of the operating room team, but also performed what she considered an equally



valuable and rewarding role—educating the patient prior to surgery. Both Dr. Riesch and Mrs. Riesch have always valued education, whether they were the recipients of new knowledge or were passing it on to colleagues, students or patients.

In fact, it was during their education that the Riesches first met as students at Milwaukee County Hospital in the 1960s. Dr. Riesch was Chief Surgical Resident and was known as a demanding perfectionist—exactly what a patient would want in a surgeon, but intimidating to medical and nursing students. But Virginia, a student nurse, was not intimidated. Instead, she identified with the doctor’s commitment to caring for his patients—a passion they rank as essential for anyone pursuing a career in the medical profession.

Although both Dr. Riesch and Mrs. Riesch were perfectly suited for healthcare, neither came from families with medical role models. Dr. Riesch was born and raised on a Wisconsin farm—a life he described as “rugged”—losing two siblings before the age of 2. Mrs. Riesch grew up in a blue collar Milwaukee neighborhood. And today no one is more surprised than they are by the personal and professional success they have achieved by following their love of medicine.

While Dr. Riesch, always assumed ultimate responsibility in the operating room, his background as a high school and college athlete reinforced the importance of teamwork, and he went to great lengths to recognize all members of the team who cared for a patient, including Virginia, and the other health care professionals. By establishing the John D. and Virginia Riesch Scholarship Endowment in 2007, the Riesches have confirmed a value they taught and modeled throughout their lives—the importance of showing appreciation. At the heart of their generosity is a desire to say thank you for the immeasurable rewards they have received through caring for patients.

This scholarship will be awarded annually to a medical student and a nursing student, both of whom are in good academic standing and exemplify qualities that promote the highest level of patient care—empathy, recognition of colleagues and support staff, a passion for learning and finally, the desire to share their knowledge to educate colleagues and patients.



Wisconsin **Medical Society**
Foundation

PO Box 1109
Madison, WI 53701
866.442.3800 toll free