When I first mentioned my interest in starting a teaching group, Roseanne Berger [senior associate dean for graduate medical education] immediately referred me to Dr. Sarkin. Without his contribution and guidance, the inception of the EDUCATE Initiative—a program designed to teach residents how to teach—would not have been possible.

While I knew him only for a brief period, we shared a passion for education and teaching. He influenced my life in such a positive way that I truly feel the loss of what the future may have held. He leaves behind a legacy that we have an obligation to continue. Together, I look forward to carrying on this teaching group in his memory, and recognizing him as our inspiration.

DAVID LEE PIERCE, MD
Second-Year Resident, Emergency Medicine
UB Medical-Dental Education Program

In addition to being a UB faculty member since 1981, Sarkin was an attending physician at the Women and Children’s Hospital of Buffalo, where he directed the General Pediatrics Newborn Nursery Service and saw patients at Hodge Pediatrics.

As coordinator of the pediatric clerkship at UB, Sarkin touched the lives of countless medical students over the years and is credited with influencing many of them to practice pediatrics. He was passionately interested in medical education and recently completed a two-year term as president of the Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics.

Sarkin was an internationally renowned expert on ways to

ROSEANNE BERGER, MD
Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education
UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences

In Memoriam

ICHARD SARKIN, MD, associate professor of clinical pediatrics in the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, died on October 19, 2004 when the commuter plane he was aboard crashed in Kirksville, Missouri. He was 54.

Considered by many to be one of the finest teachers in the medical school, Sarkin was on his way to a humanism in medicine conference at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine when the accident occurred.

In his lectures and workshops Rich drew energy from a large audience and, unlike many speakers, injected energy back into the crowd. He carried on a conversation that was peppered with humor, gestures and well-timed breaks when people could talk with each other and re-set their attention span. His delivery always looked spontaneous but was rehearsed like a play. Once he proudly described a plenary session he ran at a national meeting on a rather dry subject, HIPAA regulations. It was a debate. By the end of the session he had the ballroom full of pediatricians in suits on their feet singing H-I-P-A to the tune of YMCA. Picture that!

FORSEANNE BERGER, MD
Senior Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education
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Remembered by his friends, colleagues and students

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improve the teaching skills of faculty and residents, as well as on ways to improve how physicians communicate with patients. From 1992 to 1997 he coordinated the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences’ Teaching Effectiveness Program and was on the advisory board of the university’s Center for Teaching and Learning Resources, where he frequently conducted lectures and workshops.

In 1998, Sarkin received a State University of New York Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, and in 1993 and 2000 received the medical school’s Louis A. and Ruth Siegel Award for Excellence in Teaching.

“Rich embodied all the traits needed to be a great physician and a great medical educator—knowledge, ability, passion and compassion,” says Margaret Paroski, MD ’80, interim dean of the School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. “We will miss his talent, his willingness to mentor his colleagues and his terrific sense of humor.”

Frederick Morin, III, MD, chair of pediatrics at UB, says: “Rich was very skilled at engaging the learner, and he could do that at the bedside or in an audience with 100 people. “He was a much-sought-after speaker, and I know his passion and enthusiasm for teaching pediatrics have inspired many of us in Buffalo and around the nation.”

Sarkin earned a bachelor of arts degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1972 and worked as an elementary and middle school science teacher for two years before earning a medical degree at New York Medical College in 1977. Following medical school, he completed pediatric residency training at Women and Children’s Hospital of Buffalo, where he served as chief resident (1980–1981). In 1998, he earned a master’s in education from the University at Buffalo.

Sarkin is survived by his wife, Marcia, and their two children Alex, 16, and Jessica, a freshman in college.

It is hard to comprehend that Richard is gone. I miss him greatly but recognize that he left an amazing legacy of faculty, residents and students who were inspired by his example and who now passionately give their best to educating the next generation of competent, compassionate and humanistic physicians. He was literally and figuratively a giant in medical education—a national treasure.

Dr. Sarkin was a great teacher. His loss to the medical school is insurmountable. Richard taught in the first-year medical student course the Clinical Practice of Medicine since its inception in 1995. He served as a small group leader and as lecture faculty on the topics “The Science of Listening” and “The Pediatric Interview.” His lectures were a guaranteed of success—always fun, funny and insightful. There was never a distracted or sleeping student, no matter the lecture size.

In addition to his concern for improving teaching in medical fields, Rich Sarkin was one of the founding fathers of UB’s Center for Teaching and Learning Resources, which has the mission of improving teaching campus-wide. Always eager to learn as well as to teach, he was a regular participant in and hugely popular presenter of programs to help faculty expand their repertoires of teaching. As Rich demonstrated, teaching and learning—teachers and learners—are bound together in a reciprocal and interactive exchange.

The above comments are excerpted from longer statements, the full text of which can be read at http://www.smbs.buffalo/bp/sarkin. Also posted on this site is an excerpt from an article published in the spring 1997 issue of Buffalo Physician, titled “Teaching on the Fly,” which featured Dr. Sarkin.