
ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR

James Bell, J.D., C.P.A.

Chief Administrator, Department of Surgery



Throughout his career at the University of Michigan Health System, the impact of James Bell's work and expertise has extended well beyond his own department. Because of his collaborative style, wealth of knowledge, communication skills and institutional thinking, Mr. Bell is one of the Health System's "go to" administrators.

After a successful career in U-M Hospitals and Health Centers administration, Mr. Bell was recruited to the Medical School as administrator of the Department of Surgery in 1999. He was selected after a national search, during which candidates from leading universities and the corporate sector were interviewed.

He has been instrumental in the implementation of the Faculty Group Practice (FGP), assuming responsibility for the Livonia Surgery Center and the subsequent implementation of the East Ann Arbor Ambulatory Surgery and Medical Procedures Center. Mr. Bell provides administrative support services to the departments of Neurosurgery, Orthopaedic Surgery, Urology and Neurology in various areas of billing, collection, financial analysis and human resources.

Even though Mr. Bell was trained to focus on financial stability and success, he quickly prioritized teaching and research upon his hiring to the department. He cultivates positive working relationships across the Health System, supporting investments in space and people to advance our mission in education and research.

Within the Department of Surgery, Mr. Bell fosters an environment of open communication. His feedback is thoughtful, reasonable and fair, and his judgment is above reproach. Surgery, a pilot department in applying the new Succession Planning and Talent Management program under the Leadership Development Advisory Group, will build upon a program that Mr. Bell developed independently for section administrators and directors in the Department of Surgery.

Mr. Bell leads by example, never seeking the limelight or recognition for his many accomplishments. He is valued by his staff for his keen insight, encyclopedic knowledge and good sense of humor. Despite his busy schedule and many responsibilities, Mr. Bell always makes time for staff. He is a mentor who sincerely wants to cultivate productivity, success, and career happiness.

The directors and administrators of the Department of Surgery said it best when they wrote for his nomination, "We are inspired to seek excellence in our roles because of the standard that Jim sets and the freedom which he allows for each of us to explore the opportunities around us. Jim Bell is an administrator with an open mind, an open door and an open heart. He is a visionary leader, deeply committed to the institution and its people."

A faculty member says, "Jim constantly encourages others to better themselves, be creative and learn more. He challenges both physicians and staff to reach further, emphasizing that there is no limit." In addition to building others' confidence, he challenges them to set goals and then provides the resources to achieve those goals.

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Mr. Bell is known for building bridges within the Department of Surgery and throughout the Health System. Under his direction, many departments enjoy mutually beneficial partnerships and collaborations. He has provided leadership to the institution for such projects as the redesign of the Taubman Center's Surgery clinic space, and was integral in the implementation of the new Ambulatory Care Unit (ACU) model.

Mr. Bell serves on a wide range of operational, advisory and leadership teams across the Health System. Recently, he leveraged his extensive knowledge of the Hospital and Medical School business systems to ensure the success of the FGP/Ambulatory Care Integration project. He is a member of the FGP Budget and Finance Committee and is the administrative lead for the Taubman Medical Directors Group. He has served as a mentor for recent UMHS Administrative Fellows, many of whom worked closely with the BODT (Business Operations Design Team) and Clinical Research Billing teams.

Mr. Bell is an active member in many national, institutional and local organizational committees and workgroups. He represents the Health System at the national level in groups such as the Association of Academic Surgical Administrators, and was a catalyst in developing the Midwest Financial Credit Union.

From 1980-1999, Mr. Bell worked in the Hospitals and Health Centers finance area, starting as cost reimbursement assistant manager and rising to assistant director of finance. He managed the Hospital budget office for 14 years.

He received his BBA in accounting from Eastern Michigan University and his J.D. from Thomas M. Cooley Law School. He is a certified public accountant.

In his free time, Mr. Bell can be found working outside, reading mysteries and spending time with family. He collects sports cards and model trains and actually enjoys doing income taxes.

Mr. Bell is grateful for the loyalty and love of his family, including wife Carolyn and their children, Elizabeth, Jeffrey, Kevin and Stephen. He also is appreciative of the support and partnership of department chair, Dr. Michael Mulholland, who exemplifies open-minded and dedicated leadership. Mr. Bell would like to extend a warm thanks to everyone who works alongside him – across all sections of the department and throughout the Health System.