2017 Scientific Forum of the American College of Surgeons Dedicated to Diana Lee Farmer, MD, FACS

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It is with great pleasure that we write to dedicate the Scientific Forum at the 108th Annual Clinical Congress of the American College of Surgeons to Diana L Farmer, MD, FACS. The Scientific Forum (formerly known as the Surgical Forum) has been a longstanding and integral part of surgical training and surgical science. Many a mentee and mentor have spent countless hours finessing their hard toils into a 250-word abstract, days (or often minutes) before the deadline. Participants rejoiced with acceptances and went back to the drawing board with rejections, just to try again another year. In corners of the Clinical Congress convention center, you can always spot a seasoned surgeon and a passionate, dedicated young surgeon reviewing presentations, preparing for the discussant questions, and sharing last words of wisdom before what, for many trainees or junior surgeons, is one of their first presentations at a national meeting. It could not be more fitting than to bestow the Scientific Forum dedication on Diana; she has been spotted over the years, from San Francisco to New Orleans to Chicago and beyond, in both roles. In fact, her very first scientific presentation was in the Scientific Forum in 1988, entitled “T cells bearing the natural killer antigen leu-19 mediate non-MHC restricted activated killing of human tumors.” She has continued to be an avid supporter of the sessions, always having surgical residents present in the pediatric surgery forum (and later global surgery and beyond) and importantly, attending the sessions, listening, and supporting other budding pediatric surgeons who presented as well.

Dr Farmer, a pediatric surgeon and the Pearl Stamps Stewart Endowed Chair, is Professor and Chair of the Department of Surgery at the University of California (UC) Davis Health System, and is Surgeon-in-Chief of the UC Davis Children’s Hospital. She is a native of Chicago and graduated from Wellesley College, after which she spent 4 years studying marine biology in Bermuda, at Stanford, and at MIT/Woods Hole. She then pursued her medical degree at the University of Washington School of Medicine and remained there for 2 years of her general surgery residency. To pursue her passion in research, she took a 2-year postdoctoral fellowship in surgical oncology at University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) and stayed there to complete her general surgery training. After residency, she obtained her pediatric surgery training at Children’s Hospital of Michigan in Detroit, remained as a faculty member for 3 years, and was recruited back to UCSF as an associate professor of surgery. She rapidly moved up the academic ladder and was promoted to professor of surgery at UCSF 4 years later, and to the position of division chief of pediatric surgery. In 2011, she was appointed chair of the Department of Surgery at UC Davis.

Dr Farmer is a true surgeon-scientist who has moved her science to the bedside and operating room, ultimately having an impact on the care of surgical patients. Her laboratory made the seminal discovery that hindbrain herniation could be ameliorated by prenatal repair in a fetal sheep model. She moved this observation into trials, first in animals and then into humans, changing
the outcome of this potentially devastating congenital anomaly for countless patients and their families. She is best known for her role as principal investigator on the $22 million NIH-funded Management of Myelomeningocele Study (MOMS Trial), the results of which were published in the New England Journal of Medicine. She has been honored with numerous awards throughout her career, including becoming a Luce Scholar, a member of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, and a member of the esteemed National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine.

Dr Farmer is a national leader in surgery. Her contributions to the American College of Surgeons (ACS) are quite notable. She has served on the Board of Governors and is finishing her term as chair. She has also served on the ACS Resident Education Committee, Research Committee, the Program Committee, and Advisory committees. In addition, she has held several other national leadership positions including the current presidency of the American Pediatric Surgical Association and current chairmanship of the Society of Surgical Chairs.

Importantly, throughout her career, Dr Farmer has served as an inspiration to future surgeons and scientists—practicing international surgeons, junior faculty, fellows, residents, medical students, and premedical students. I remember speaking with Dr Farmer when I was a resident on the pediatric surgery service at UCSF and asking when her division would start a fellowship, figuring it was coming any day. Her answer, 15 years ago, made a lasting impression on me. She said that by allowing the 7 UCSF surgical residents per year to have a diverse and engaging experience on the pediatric surgery service, in the end, she had the potential to make a bigger impact on the field of pediatric surgery than by training 1 fellow every year or every other year. She was absolutely right—over the years, between 1 and 3 surgical residents per year entered pediatric surgery fellowship training. The majority were swayed by their rotation experience and work with Dr Farmer. This is just one example of Dr Farmer’s broad, strategic, and selfless views on the next generation of surgeons. It is unique and as a result, Diana will leave an indelible mark on pediatric surgery, and now surgery as a whole for many, many years to come. In closing, we cannot think of a more fitting person on whom to bestow the honor of the Scientific Forum dedication than Dr Farmer.