For 40 years, Marie Trontell, MD ‘76, professor of medicine and associate dean for graduate medical education, has helped guide the growth of Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. In June, as she prepared to leave her administrative post, Dr. Trontell expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve the school in such a variety of ways, adding, “The medical school has come full circle, and it is a good time for me to step down as associate dean for graduate medical education.” In the coming year, while continuing to teach and care for her patients, she will assist in the ongoing process of integration between the medical school and Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

“The spirit of the school hasn’t changed, but its footprint certainly has,” says Dr. Trontell. Hospital and medical school buildings have replaced the frame houses, driveways, and flower gardens she used to see from her office window. “I moved from the New Brunswick Medical Education Building to the Piscataway Research Tower to the New Brunswick Professional Building, and finally back to the Medical Education Building. I hope it isn’t prophetic that the part of the Professional Building where my office used to be is now the deep end of the swimming pool in the fitness center.”

Medical Student and Resident: The Journey Begins

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Douglass College, Dr. Trontell taught high school biology for three years before resuming her longtime plan to pursue a career in medicine. She matriculated at Rutgers Medical School with the Class of 1976, in which she was one of 23 women in a class of 112. (Times have changed: women constitute 63 percent of the Class of 2016.)

Among Dr. Trontell’s classmates was Robert Amler, MD ’76, vice president for government affairs and dean and professor of public health, New York Medical College. Dr. Amler recalls Dr. Trontell not only as an excellent student—she was inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha honor society in her fourth year—but also as “a person of extraordinary spirit, who made everyone comfortable and loved her class and her school.”

Dr. Trontell has two diplomas from Rutgers Medical School, the second earned after she completed the internal medicine residency there, having served as chief resident. “No one was surprised that Marie did her residency there, having served as chief resident. “No one was surprised that Marie did her residency at the medical school,” says Dr. Amler. “It just seemed organic for someone who loved the place so much.”

When Dr. Trontell was a resident, her intern was her future colleague Anthony T. Scardella, MD, professor and interim chair, Department of Medicine, and senior associate dean for clinical affairs. “She had all the facts at her fingertips,” he says. “More important, she taught in the moment, modeling the behavior of a compassionate
and caring clinician, demonstrating critical judgment—how you process your knowledge into good patient care.”

As she neared the end of her residency, Dr. Trontell was increasingly intrigued by pulmonary medicine—a blend of science, physiology, and patient contact—and was encouraged by the pulmonology faculty to pursue the division’s fellowship. Among her champions was David J. Riley, MD, now a professor of medicine. “It was a time of great growth and activity for us, and to build the fellowship, we were recruiting the best,” says Dr. Riley.

She accepted a faculty appointment directly following her fellowship, serving as an active member of the pulmonary division and as director of medical education at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital (then Middlesex General Hospital). In 1983, she was asked by Edward D. Harris, MD, professor and chair, Department of Medicine, to become the first director of the internal medicine residency program; she accepted and served in this position for 13 years.

“She was very effective in developing and solidifying the residency,” says Dr. Riley. “Competent and quietly forceful, she related extremely well to students, residents, and house staff. She attracted top people to the program and drove it forward with her high standards.”

Shaping the Curriculum and Leading Graduate Medical Education

In addition to leading the residency program, Dr. Trontell played an important role in curricular planning and implementation. She became associate dean for academic affairs in 1996 and was a member of the Education Task Force that reviewed the preclinical curriculum and proposed integral changes, particularly in the second year. The task force’s model, “ASK—Attitude, Skills, Knowledge,” summarized a new direction featuring interdepartmental planning, small-group classes, and added opportunities for self-directed learning. As vision became reality, she enjoyed playing a key role in the redesign of the Kessler Teaching Laboratories to accommodate small-group classrooms.

Dr. Trontell served as associate dean for academic affairs for five years before her appointment, in 2001, as senior associate dean for education, with responsibility for undergraduate and graduate medical education. During this time, she led a study of the curriculum that proposed major revisions

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