On October 15th, Dr. Alice McPherson was on the UW campus to receive the Distinguished Alumni Award, one of four honorees recognized at the Chancellor’s Luncheon.

Dr. McPherson, the only remaining living doctor after whom one of our SMPH Learning Communities is named, visited her namesake House on October 15th. M1-M4 students from McPherson House were invited to meet her, as were students of the Ophthalmology Interest Group.

Dr. McPherson, who continues to practice full time, established the Retina Research Foundation as well as the McPherson Eye Research Institute at UW-Madison. In the 1960s, recognizing a gap in the area of retinal detachment, Dr. McPherson promoted several procedures that are now accepted basic elements in successful retinal detachment surgery and the treatment of diabetic retinopathy.

SMPH students greeted Dr. McPherson with standing applause as she entered the room and engaged the group with information and stories.

Dr. Middleton, former Dean for SMPH, served as one of Dr. McPherson’s instructors when she was a medical student. Dr. Middleton used a brown derby—a gift from some of his students—as a lecture prop. Students who didn’t know the answer to one of his questions were required to sign and wear the brown derby. According to Dr. McPherson, by the end of the semester, everyone had worn the brown derby; the take-away message is that no one knows everything about medicine. There are always things that you won’t know and will need to learn how to research or ask others.

Other “McPherson Gems” that students heard are that Dr. McPherson believes that Wisconsin teaches “the basics” and good doctors will always need to refer to their basic knowledge.

When asked about her favorite memory from medical school, Dr. McPherson recalled that working with patients was her favorite memory. Taking it forward, longitudinally, Dr. McPherson said that “learning to really listen to the patient” was key because you want your patient to “walk out of your office feeling that they’ve seen a caring doctor.”

We are grateful for the time that Dr. McPherson dedicated to us on October 15th!