

Kansas Family Physician of the Year wears many hats

By Marina Spexarth



Entering the office of our 2016 Kansas Family Physician of the Year, CHARLES T. ALLRED, MD, it is obvious he has a love of art, or perhaps more of a love for the artists. His walls are adorned with paintings and drawings by his daughter and wife and lots of family photos along his desk. We even spotted a little artwork from a Smoky Hill resident! At first glance, you can tell that his heart lies with the people he cares about most. Dr. Allred's office is at Smoky Hill Family Medicine Residency in Salina, where he is a faculty member serving as associate director at Smoky Hill and clinical assistant professor in the Department of Family & Community Medicine, KU School of Medicine-Wichita.

Dr. Allred wears many hats. "Through the years I have had many jobs. I have been both a rural and an urban family physician, an ER doctor, an academician, a district coroner, and a leader in local and state medical associations and in the hospital. I have helped mothers give birth, performed operations, made diagnoses of rare and common diseases. I have sat quietly by a person's bedside when they were dying and I had nothing else to offer," he says about what it means to be a family physician. On this day in particular, he was the teacher; during the interview we were quietly interrupted by a resident, asking for Dr. Allred's consult on a patient.

In each of his roles he gives patients his undivided attention, showing great compassion and care. A patient writes, "My kids always liked going to doctor's appointments because they like Dr. Allred so much."

He has patients from four-generation families and he cares for them all. From those needing prenatal and pediatric care to the aged, Dr. Allred is a sought-after family physician. He delivers babies and is delighted when it's for a family in which he takes care of several generations. He chuckles and says, "I enjoy delivering babies, especially in the day time."

Growing up, Dr. Allred lived in many states in the central U.S. His family settled in Council Grove, Kan. where he graduated high school and it was also the first place he practiced medicine. It was in high school that he first thought about becoming a doctor. He identified with the main

character in a book he read; the character was a medical student becoming a pediatrician. He says, "My motivation for becoming a physician was that I wanted to help others. Later on, I figured out that there were a few other reasons: I learned I liked the puzzle a lot – figuring out what someone's illness is, given the data. I liked being called 'doctor.' I liked being the person who helped make decisions. And I didn't mind getting paid a lot. But I would still say that at the base of it was and is a desire to help others and the satisfaction that is gained from that endeavor."

After high school, Dr. Allred went on to Kansas State University to obtain his bachelor degree and University of Kansas School of Medicine where he received his medical degree. He completed his residency and an obstetrics fellowship at Wesley Family Medicine Residency in Wichita.

So why family medicine? "The first time I saw a baby born, I really thought I wanted to be an obstetrician. The excitement, the joy, the blood, the noise – and basically the mom does all the work -- at least most of the time. Then I went on an internal medicine service. That was really different. We walked around seeing patients almost all day in the hospital, talking about whether it was better to use penicillin or ampicillin, what were the causes of atrial fibrillation that needed to be checked for, why internal medicine was the best specialty. And what I liked about it was you could talk and argue about anything. The resident would make sure you knew you didn't know what you were talking about but gave you the freedom to propose whatever you wanted to propose. I was afraid of psychiatrists and knew I didn't have a surgeon's personality. Maybe family medicine? I went on my rural preceptorship and spent time with two family doctors that mostly prescribed intravenous calcium and B 12 and oral diazepam. I wasn't sure I liked that much at all," writes Dr. Allred. (You can hear the quick wit and dry humor in his comments.)

After his preceptorship was the clerkship in family medicine, which he did under Wichita General Practitioner, Dr. Jack Moseley. He recalls his experience: "He opened my eyes to good family medicine. He was a dinosaur. He didn't do obstetrics but he did everything else. It was his relationship with his patients that seemed extraordinary. He taught me how to get down on my hands and knees and get a baby to laugh. He taught me to engage the patients. He also was a great model for how to teach students. I was inspired. I saw a person who was enthusiastic about caring for patients and families over time, who was smart, who took care of the whole patient, and who led others to trust him. He also taught me to work over the lunch hour and stay too late at the office. But we did cancel patients one day and go fishing. Jack Moseley showed me how to be a family physician and how to do it well." Dr. Moseley died shortly after Dr. Allred finished residency at Wesley Family Medicine Residency. Other mentors he recalls are Vic Vorhees MD who knew the answer to any life issues, according to Dr. Allred and

also Drs. Terry Merrifield, Ron Brown, Carol Johnson and Dave Miller.

About five years ago, Dr. Allred became the medical director of Central Kansas Foundation (CKF), the local center for treatment of chemical dependency, particularly opioid abuse. He not only provides medical care to the clients, but has also been instrumental in developing behavioral health coursework for the residency program and behavioral health integration in the medical clinic. One of his projects is the pain management protocol, which sets out a process by which medical providers can assess the necessity for narcotic pain management as well as behavioral health counseling for patients with chronic pain. With the high incidence of prescription drug abuse and addiction, his efforts in this area have a community impact. His high visibility in the

community and willingness to serve as an effective liaison between the medical and social services community has created many opportunities to advance important and meaningful collaborations.

He explains that he accepted the position because the former director was leaving the state and he felt it was an important role in the community to continue. "I didn't have any special training prior to starting and like many of us, learned on the job. It is frequently not easy to deal with people who have problems with addiction and I didn't like it much initially. Over time, it has become a very satisfying part of my practice. I am not sure there is an area where I have had a bigger impact in patient care. I think I do it better because I am a family physician," Dr. Allred says.

An administrator writes, "Not only do our patients tell us that he takes the time to listen to them, but he always takes the time to visit with our staff. In my view, this is a rare and precious quality that is routinely offered by Dr. Allred and which never fails to purchase good will and improved cooperation."

Dr. Allred loves being a family physician. And being a teacher to those who are becoming family physicians is the other thing that he loves and takes great satisfaction in doing. Dr. Allred's perspective on the future of family medicine: "Physicians my age sometimes grouse about the younger generations. 'They don't care as much. They don't work as hard. They have it easy.' Those words are all baloney. They care every bit as much. The parts that were hard 40 years ago are still the hard things today. It is not the hours or the amount to learn. It is making hard decisions when there is no clear answer. It is doubting yourself when things don't turn out the way you expected. It is staying awake at night wondering if what you did was right. It is sitting with the patient or the family after something bad has happened. What makes new physicians able to do it now is the same as what made us able to do it then – a willingness to sacrifice oneself with the hope and confidence that a difference can be made. I am inspired by the young people who are

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willing to follow that path. I am happy that I can be a part of their journey." One of his students writes, "Dr. Allred is one of the most selfless, compassionate, and dedicated physicians with whom I have had the opportunity to work. He inspires confidence in medical students, residents, fellow physicians, staff, and patients alike. His approachability and humility are par none. His medical knowledge is overwhelming. His sincere bedside manner is incredibly humbling. While many family physicians possess some of these characteristics, few possess all."

Dr. Allred participates in the interview board for the KU School of Medicine to select medical school students from among the many candidates. He also facilitates small-group sessions at the medical school, instructs a yearly airway management practicum for medical students. He teaches the yearly ALSO course for incoming residents in Wichita, and gives numerous lectures. "Dr. Allred changed the way I see medicine, but also the way I see myself. He's the reason I first became interested in family medicine. He was the first person I talked to about a career in academic medicine, and he supported me with the advice and resources to achieve that goal. He helped me cultivate my own identity as both a physician and a teacher. He believed in me from the start. I owe him more than a simple letter could ever say," writes a former student.

A love for teaching is matched with a love for his community. Dr. Allred's community work has left a legacy of better health: tobacco-free public places, greater access to care for all residents, and highly-trained physicians for rural Kansas. He is a champion of family medicine. Dr. Allred believes that it is a family physician's responsibility to not only provide excellent patient care, but to also make one's community a safer, healthier place to live. He is not afraid to step up and take a leadership role and has been formative in the development of many other physician leaders.

Dr. Allred was an effective leader in the development of a safety net clinic in Salina to provide the underserved access to care.

For the past several years, Dr. Allred has also been an active member of a prenatal education coalition through collaboration with the Saline County Health Department. That alliance resulted in the creation of prenatal education groups- offered in both English and Spanish which are integrated into the routine prenatal care offered at SFHC. These educational sessions provide pregnant patients with the support, knowledge and tools to maximize their well-being during pregnancy, resulting in healthier mothers and babies.

"Dr. Allred's influence as a faculty member and former program director at the Smoky Hill Family Medicine Residency program have been instrumental in training physicians for rural Kansas for the past 20 years. He has acted as not only an educator, but as a mentor and even counselor to many medical students, residents and their families. The Smoky Hill Family Medicine Residency Program is nationally acclaimed as an outstanding program in training residents for rural practice and an enviable 85+% of graduates practice in rural areas of Kansas. Many cite Dr. Allred's influence in their confidence and ability to handle anything that rural practice brings.

"The influence and impact Dr. Allred has had as a teaching family physician is incredible. He has helped train more than 92 Smoky Hill Residency graduates, and will thereby indirectly touch the lives of over 100,000 Kansans. Dr. Allred's impact on the health and well-being of rural Kansas is truly staggering. His patients, colleagues and students alike have great admiration and respect for



Dr. Allred relaxes at his desk surrounded by photos of loved one (i.e. grandkids). He says that one of the things he enjoys most is watching his two daughters become mothers.

him. Dr. Allred is an influential teacher and stands out to many as a teacher who challenges and supports his students and instills a passion for learning.

"Over 16 years I have known Dr. Allred in several different capacities: as a program director and teacher; as my boss; as an employee; as my children's primary care physician; as a leader in our community; and as a leader in family medicine. Through all of that, I am proud to say that I have always known him as a friend, a trusted advisor, and a mentor. I can say with confidence that there are only a few family physicians in Kansas who have done as much or more for family medicine in Kansas than Dr. Allred," writes Rob Frelove, MD, CEO/Program Director, Salina Family Healthcare Center, Smoky Hill Family Medicine Residency Program.

Everyone seems to have an Allred story, and his impact can be felt in many communities, throughout Kansas, especially in rural areas. "It is Dr. Allred's demeanor that makes him so special. He is fun, has a great sense of humor but at the same time is very caring and thorough. He never takes a chance on a diagnosis and has no ego," writes a patient.

It's been almost 40 years ago since his experience with Dr. Moseley, and much is the same for Dr. Allred today. Relationships are the heart of family medicine. "It still gives me an intellectual thrill to figure out what the diagnosis is and help implement a treatment plan. I love well baby checkups -- where else do you get to play with a baby and call it work? I am challenged daily by the same things that challenged me at the beginning," Dr. Allred has delivered thousands of babies, saved numerous lives, counseled families, shared terminal diagnoses, served happy news, taught residents, corrected students, and told countless stories and jokes (many at his own expense!)

Hats off to Charles T. Allred, MD – art-lover and 2016 Kansas Family Physician of the Year!

Dr. Allred is married to Janda (an artist!). They have three children: Kate, an art teacher in Perry, Okla.; Emily an obstetrician in Independence, Mo; and Tucker who is a fourth year medical student at KU going into neurology.