

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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DOCTOR DONATES MEDICAL ANTIQUES TO UT SOUTHWESTERN

DALLAS — November 7, 1995 — An extensive collection of mortars and pestles recently donated to UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas should remind today's physicians of how much the profession has changed over the past century, said donor Dr. Robert I. Kramer.

Kramer, a pediatrician on the UT Southwestern faculty for more than 25 years and the founding medical director of the cystic fibrosis center at Children's Medical Center of Dallas, said he collected the 120 mortars and pestles over three decades. Mortars are the vessels in which substances, such as medications, are ground into powders using clublike instruments called pestles.

The collection includes mortars and pestles dating from the 17th century onward. They were collected from throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia. Kramer gained a reputation as one of the country's most dedicated collectors, and antique dealers would contact him whenever they encountered unusual sets.

Kramer's interest began when his father, also a physician, gave him a mortar and pestle that had been presented to him by a patient who could not pay his bill during the Great Depression. That mortar and pestle will be the only set Kramer will keep at home.

"I wanted to give my collection to UT Southwestern because I've been an active participant in its affairs for over 35 years, developed friendships and professional relationships that I cherish, and consider this gift as my legacy to a great institution," Kramer said.

The instruments stand as proof, he said, that medicine was an "inexact science well into this century." Only in the past few decades have technological advances made mortars and pestles obsolete, as doctors and pharmacists no longer need to grind medications individually for each patient.

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Many of the mortars and pestles are brass, while others are made of stone or wood. Kramer finds it interesting that a style of mortar and pestle obtained from Pakistan is almost identical in shape to a set carved by a Native American tribe of the northwestern United States.

"I think it illustrates the universality of man and how artifacts can be so similar in cultures that have had no common heritage or obvious contact," he said.

UT Southwestern is in the process of obtaining display cases for the collection and is considering several locations for their presentation.

"We are delighted that Dr. Kramer decided UT Southwestern would make an appropriate permanent home for his collection," said Dr. Kern Wildenthal, UT Southwestern president. "I am sure faculty members, staff and students will enjoy being able to view this superb collection."

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