

June 12, 1980

News

The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235 (214)688-3404

CONTACT: Ann Harrell
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/369-2695

*****Ross set to take T.M.A. office.

DALLAS--William Ross, M.D., tips back in his office chair, heads off a fall by balancing on his boot heels and says of his recent election as president-elect of the Texas Medical Association, "I'm just an old pea picker who just happened along to provide a little common sense."

However, the family physician's record of involvement in the progress of medicine and medical education at both state and national levels raises doubts that the "old pea picker's" common sense was the only consideration. Ross is the head of the family practice program at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas, one of the biggest in the state. He has served for the past nine years as a member of the T.M.A.'s prestigious Council on Medical Education and for the past five years has acted as chairman.

At the group's final meeting in May under Ross's chairmanship, the members presented the UT educator with a letter--now proudly framed in his office--thanking him for his service to medicine and medical education throughout his term. It read in part:

The immeasurable strides made by the Council of Medical Education during your tenure as a member, and especially as chairman, will be felt for many years to come...(You have been) a truly positive dynamic force in the interactions of medical education and the practice of medicine in Texas. Your guidance and foresight have had significant impact in the realms of legislation, education, family practice, data on research and health care access approaches in Texas. In addition, you have achieved outstanding success in developing personal communications among the many institutions and organizations concerned with medical education--with one goal in mind, the betterment of patient care.

It closed with "Our special thanks."

Looking at the citation, the doctor from East Texas grins wryly and says, "It's a long way from Mount Enterprise, ain't it?"

Mount Enterprise, home town of the physician/rancher who came to the health science center two years ago to head up the family practice residency program, is where Ross got his roots in both medicine and the land. His father practiced medicine there until his death, and his brother Griff, now deputy director of the Clinical Center at the National Institutes of Health, also had a small practice there. Ross still raises hay and pine trees on the family land, which, he says is the "biggest heritage I got from my dad." Before moving to Dallas he was in private practice for many years in San Benito, Tex., and raised prize-winning Beefmaster cattle on the side.

Ross's office houses a strange mixture of awards, citations and certificates. These include his memberships in the Advisory Committee for Graduate Medical Education of the American Medical Association, the Society of Teachers for Family Medicine, the American Academy of Family Practitioners and the National Association of Program Directors, a group on medical education. There are also a trophy for the women's softball team he coached in South Texas, two blue ribbons for his hay and a Texas forestry award, as well as cross sections of beautiful pieces of stone he has picked up on his outings as a "rock hound." And they are all important.

Ross sees his job as president-elect of the T.M.A. as a back-up and virtual shadow to new president Durwood Neal, M.D. of Fort Worth. Coincidentally, Neal is also a specialist in family practice.

--over--

first add ross

The organization itself Ross views as being vital to the future of medicine in the state. The T.M.A., he says, is the organization that has the responsibility to address the entire spectrum of the profession on a state level--from research to both graduate and undergraduate education to the practicing physician to the government employee. It provides a forum for not only the new techniques and advances being made in science and education but for the many problems in health care. The organization also offers the opportunity for the members of the profession to come together in a consensus and speak with one voice.

To the question of whether family physicians can expect to lead a group that has become more discipline-oriented in the last few decades, Ross points out that family practice, too, is a discipline today, and the family practitioner is also highly trained in graduate residency programs. All physicians, he says, have the same goals. "That goal is to provide the best care for their patients; that's the goal of the T.M.A., too. And those aren't just words. That really means something to me."

The UT faculty member also believes it's time to get rid of the myth that "teachers in medical school are doctors who can't make a living, and private docs can't teach."

"Hell, we know better," he says, referring to his T.M.A. associates who have given so many hours to the organization, both those in private practice and those in academia.

Most people, doctors included, assume that the T.M.A. members are mostly physicians in private practice. That's not so, says Ross. Many physicians who are full-time teachers are T.M.A. members. They also take leadership roles, serving on committees, as delegates and as consultants. The physician in academia, he says, can contribute a lot of important information about what's needed in medical education, as well as advances in patient care.

Physicians are always being accused of self-interests. That's not true either, says Ross. "There's plenty for everybody to do and plenty to be done." In the T.M.A., the doctors "will do to wade the branch with," words of highest praise in the country.

Students are also listened to in the T.M.A., says the educator. Residents serve on committees, including the one on medical education, have their own T.M.A.-sponsored meetings and send representatives to organizational councils. In this way "new blood" keeps feeding into the organization.

Relationships with students are also important to Ross on campus. Besides sponsoring the Family Practice Club at UTHSCD, he is responsible for including an emphasis on family practice in the medical school curriculum. For the past two springs, he has organized a seminar for senior students on the economics of medical care dealing with both urban and rural situations. He also brings residents in family practice who are graduates of the Dallas school to campus to talk about their residency programs where they are working now, as well as to "coach" interested students in techniques for interviewing for their own f.p. residencies. In addition, the doctor's door is always open to students who want to talk about anything. But, he says, more often than not these students want to talk about what it's like practicing family medicine, often in small towns.

"Once these young men and women find out how much fun it is to practice in a rural or semi-rural area, so many will decide to, they'll have to pass a law against it."

##

DISTRIBUTION: A,SA,SC,SL