

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN MEDICAL CENTER AT DALLAS HONORS BRITISH SURGEON WITH WEIGELT-WALLACE AWARD

LONDON — December 7, 1995 — A new international award to honor physicians for exemplary medical care was presented today to a British doctor who saved a woman in a jet high above the Bay of Bengal last May.

The Weigelt-Wallace Award was established by Texas philanthropist H. Ross Perot in recognition of "extraordinary dedication and sacrifice on behalf of medicine and mankind." Perot asked The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas — one of the nation's leading academic medical centers with four Nobel laureates on its 900-member faculty — to administer the prize. The institution appointed physicians to a committee to select recipients.

The award is the only international recognition of its kind honoring exceptional examples of patient care. The award was inspired by the example of Dr. John Weigelt and U.S. Navy Commander Mark Wallace, physicians who, from opposite sides of the globe, worked together to save a United States National Guardsman critically wounded in the 1991 Gulf War.

"Every day, doctors in every corner of the world deliver care to patients with exceptional skill and dedication, often under difficult or dangerous conditions," UT Southwestern president Dr. Kern Wildenthal said in announcing the award. "The Weigelt-Wallace Award is intended to highlight and honor examples of clinical care that are truly extraordinary.

"We are grateful that UT Southwestern was chosen to help call the world's attention to the contributions and sacrifices made by doctors to the welfare of their patients," he said. "Examples of remarkable compassion and courage inspire us all — both those of us inside the medical community and those we serve."

Former British Prime Minister Lady Thatcher presented Professor Angus Wallace of University Hospital, Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham, with the \$50,000 honorarium, a scroll and a specially commissioned sculpture at a ceremony today. Professor Wallace said he will donate his honorarium to the University of Nottingham to help inaugurate a "Medical School Silver Jubilee Endowment Fund," to promote research funding for the medical school as it prepares to celebrate its 25th anniversary in 1995-96.

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Two American doctors, J. Andy Sullivan and David Tuggle, both of The University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, were presented the first Weigelt-Wallace Award by President Clinton in a White House ceremony in October for their rescue of a woman trapped deep inside the rubble of the bombed-out Oklahoma City federal building.

Last May, Professor Angus Wallace reacted to a medical crisis on a British Airways flight from Hong Kong to London. When Paula Dixon, who had been in a motorcycle accident on her way to the airport, complained of pain shortly after takeoff, Wallace, a professor of orthopaedic and accident surgery, recognized that his fellow passenger had suffered a collapsed lung. Her condition was unstable and Wallace feared a descent would bring about a fatal change in air pressure.

So, using a scalpel and local anesthetic from the 747's medical kit, a bottle of water and a rubber urinary catheter, scissors and a coat hanger sterilized in five-star brandy, he operated on the woman's chest to release the air compressing her lung.

"Although this was a fairly stressful operation for everyone concerned I do think that, presented with the same circumstances, a number of my surgical colleagues in the UK would have acted in a similar way," Professor Wallace said. "There is no doubt that my training on an Advanced Trauma and Life Support (ATLS) course improved my confidence to proceed with the operation."

The perilous surgery performed by Professor Wallace, with makeshift equipment, took about 10 minutes — about the time it took Sullivan and Tuggle to perform an operation that saved Dana Bradley's life on April 19 in Oklahoma City.

In the hours after the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building was bombed, Sullivan and Tuggle crawled into the darkness and debris that had been the building's basement, to the spot where Bradley lay pinned beneath a concrete slab.

As cold water from broken pipes leaked water on them and the possibility of another bomb or a collapse of the precarious rubble threatened, Sullivan, chairman of the Department of Orthopedic Surgery at the OU Health Sciences Center, and Tuggle, an associate professor of surgery there, realized that the only way to free her was to amputate her leg.

Using four surgical knives and his own pocketknife and a tourniquet fashioned from nylon rope, Sullivan amputated her right leg at the knee while Tuggle monitored the victim in a cavern so small they could barely move.

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The doctors for whom the award is named attended the presentation ceremonies in London. Weigelt is now professor and vice chairman of the Department of Surgery at the University of Minnesota, and Cmdr. Wallace (who is not related to Professor Wallace) is now stationed at the Naval Medical Center in San Diego, Calif.

The man they saved, National Guardsman David Campbell of Pennsylvania and his wife, Gail, also attended the British ceremonies.

Campbell was wounded in a SCUD missile attack on his barracks in February 1991, and was near death when friends connected Weigelt, at UT Southwestern, with Cmdr. Wallace, a specialist in infectious diseases who remained at the soldier's bedside in Bahrain for days. The two doctors conferred by a special satellite telephone link until Campbell's crisis passed.

"I don't think I'm special," Weigelt said recently. "I was just doing what any physician would have done. But I think this award is an excellent idea. Unfortunately, our society and our culture have a tendency to emphasize the bad things a few physicians do. It's rare today to see physicians receive the positive recognition so many deserve."

Cmdr. Wallace said the advice and encouragement he received from Weigelt, along with assistance from other U.S. and Arab doctors and Navy nurses, were crucial to Campbell's recovery.

"I'm grateful and humbled that this award is named in part for me, but many people worked very hard," Cmdr. Wallace said. "When you're confronted with a situation like that, you just do it. I think it's great that Mr. Perot decided to shine the light on the dedication that physicians have for their patients."

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