

## **West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine**

### **The Journey from a Remarkable Past to a Remarkable Future**

Today we celebrate the remarkable journey of the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine. A journey that began with the vision of our founders and is rooted in the heritage of West Virginia. A journey that involved the unwavering resolve, dedication and commitment by so many who supported the School, throughout its remarkable history. And a journey that will help guide us into a remarkable future.

All those who joined this journey along the way had in common a certain spirit ingrained in and exemplified by West Virginians, a spirit to face and overcome immense obstacles in order to provide opportunities for themselves and others. This spirit, with deep historical roots, is ever-present in West Virginia.

Perhaps said best by noted West Virginia Historian Ronald Eller, when he described the history of West Virginia as, “ a history of conflict, a history of struggle; but it is also a history of people hanging together ...of people knowing who they are and of people learning how to come together, to increasingly address their problems” . Eller adds “ we have a sense of community in West Virginia that many other parts of the country wish they had.”

It is with this same spirit that the School’ s founders and its administration, faculty and staff, the West Virginia Osteopathic Medical Society, the community of Lewisburg and many other supporters overcame innumerable barriers to establish and advance our School.

The prospect for a new medical school in West Virginia was made possible from a confluence of unrelated events in 1972. The Viet Nam War had made it difficult to attract applicants to the Greenbrier Military School, and the Military School had ceased operation, thus providing an available site for the new medical school. The downturn in the coal mining industry in the early 1970' s had the effect of miners, and subsequently doctors, abandoning the state in great numbers, creating an immense void in primary care physicians, especially in the rural areas. And then there were those visionary, philanthropic physicians within West Virginia' s osteopathic medical profession. They knew the challenges were great, but so to was the opportunity to create something remarkable, and thus the Founders embarked upon our journey.

The initial vision began with the foresight of Dr. Frank Wallington and others to start a new osteopathic medical school for West Virginia, and to provide additional opportunities for students to become physicians. In April, 1972, Dr. Wallington was at a meeting of the Appalachian Regional Medical Commission when one of the owners of the Greenbrier Military School offered to sell the property. The Moore family, who owned the property, wanted it to continue as an educational facility. Dr. Wallington saw the opportunity to establish an osteopathic medical school and was able to secure an option for six months for a mere \$10,000 to determine whether the West Virginia Society of Osteopathic Medicine wanted to buy the property.

About ten osteopathic physicians from the State Society pledged the \$10,000, even though many felt the challenge was overwhelming. The West Virginia Society of Osteopathic Medicine then provided the funds to pay for the option.

Four physicians from the State Society came to Lewisburg to meet with the Moore Family. These were Dr. Carlton Apgar, Dr. Don Newell Sr, Dr. O.J. Bailes, who is here with us today, and Dr. Wallington. These individuals became known as the founders of the school.

With the West Virginia heritage and spirit profoundly engrained within them, these individuals saw an opportunity to address the medical needs of West Virginia by creating a medical school dedicated to primary care and the special health care needs of West Virginia and Appalachia. It was not easy and it would test the strength of their resolve. But the spirit of West Virginia compelled them on.

Fred Smith, the first Executive Vice President of WVSOM, described the challenge this way, “ when you think of all the obstacles that we’ ve faced, not only legislative, but just in starting up and getting approval for the school, most people would lay heavy odds against this school ever surviving” ..Mr. Smith continued ...“ And then when I think about why we could make it under such circumstances, it becomes pretty obvious why we overcame these obstacles. Our purpose - the mission of this institution from the beginning - was to train primary care physicians for rural Appalachia and West Virginia, and that need is still critical” .

Mr. Smith summed up our School’ s destiny in ten words: “ It was the Medical School that was meant to be” .

So in December, 1972, the Greenbrier College of Osteopathic Medicine received its charter from the State. Four volunteers, Dr. Sue Keller, Fred Smith, Dr. Elizabeth Blatt and founding

president Dr. Roland Sharp, along with the founders and Dr. Alexander Trefz, led the effort to make the school operational.

Of particular challenge was accreditation. The founders and volunteers spent countless hours trying to obtain approval from the American Osteopathic Association accrediting body. It was not easy, and it would test the strength of their resolve. But the West Virginia spirit compelled them on and they persevered against all odds, and ultimately received provisional accreditation in late summer, 1974.

The school began operation on October 14, 1974. With minimal available funds, many private osteopathic physicians and a local bank provided interim support. Fortunately, legislation making the school a state institution of higher education was signed by Governor Arch Moore on March 6, 1975. And on January 1, 1976, the Greenbrier College of Osteopathic Medicine became the West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine.

Our struggles did not conclude with the establishment of WVSOM, for even after becoming a State school, efforts were made in the early 1980' s to close the School. Many of you here today, members of the Lewisburg and Greater Greenbrier communities, and many others throughout the state, banded together to support our school, and we survived. To each of you who assisted our school, we express our deep appreciation, and will be forever grateful.

The contributions of the Founders, Dr. Trefz, Dr. Sharp, Dr. Olen Jones and other presidents, their administrations, faculties and staffs, the West Virginia Society of Osteopathic Medicine, the

Lewisburg community, state and federal officials, foundations and so many others, cannot be overstated. Each played a key role in the establishment and continuation of the school and there are certainly unsung heroes among you here today, and among those who could not be with us.

That which is the essence of who we are, drew us together as one community, resolved to ensure that the great opportunities before us would continue for generations to come. And like Ronald Eller' s description of the history of West Virginia, the history of the founding and continuation of West Virginia School of Osteopathic Medicine is a history of opportunity, of overcoming obstacles, of coming together to address its challenges, with a sense of community and of a School surviving and ultimately thriving. It was a remarkable Journey, a remarkable past.

Today our School enjoys a national reputation. According to US News & World Reports 2010 annual edition of America' s Best Graduate Schools, WVSOM is ranked second in the nation of all medical schools, both allopathic and osteopathic, in the percentage of graduates entering primary care. Also in that same publication, WVSOM has been ranked as one of the top medical schools in the country in the areas of primary care, family medicine and/or rural medicine, for eleven straight years.

However, the success of WVSOM, can best be told, not through its national rankings, but through the stories of its students. For our school provides a central element to the fulfillment of dreams, that of opportunity. Many bright and talented individuals had the capacity to become physicians, but not the opportunity. WVSOM provides that opportunity.

Today we have much to be proud of. Indeed, 2,000 students have graduated from our school and followed their own journey to success. I wish to share with you the journeys of just a few of our students, and perhaps these selected stories will remind you of your own.

David Allen, D.O., class of 1978, was the first person to receive the Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from WVSOM. He graduated with just 32 other students in that founding class. He had previously attended Union High School, in Monroe County, WV in 1967. His father was the post master in Union; and David attended Marshall University. He worked at odd jobs while in high school and college to make ends meet – at a dairy farm, with brick masons, at a tire company and after graduation, as a cytotechnologist. He entered Greenbrier College of Osteopathic Medicine in 1974, with the opportunity never previously given to him, and the hope that his education would help address the need for primary care doctors in West Virginia. Dr. Allen went on to receive his residency in family medicine and returned to Greenbrier County; opened his practice, and is still there today. His daughter, Kelly, is now a first year student at WVSOM. I believe Dr. Allen and Kelly are here today. If Dr. Allen and Kelly would please stand and let' s recognize them.

Kim Chi Quang, D.O., Class of 1995, left Viet Nam in 1979 on a crowded, dilapidated, small boat with her father, leaving her mother and brother behind, who could not join them until 1990. They were at sea for 21 days, ordered out of Malaysia by the government, robbed by Thailand pirate boats, and rescued by an European ship. Kim started school in the eighth grade, fluent in French, but hardly knowing a word of English. She graduated from Greenbrier East High School in 1984, and West Virginia University in 1989, and thereafter entered WVSOM, receiving doctor

of osteopathic medicine degree in 1995. Dr. Quang is currently practicing psychiatry in North Carolina.

Clyde Rorrer, Jr. D.O., Class of 1990, attended a high school that did not even have microscopes for its students. Although educated to be a teacher, no jobs in that field were available at the time of his graduation, so he worked as an insurance salesman, a car salesman, a construction worker, an electrician, a track layer in the coal mines and then worked in preventative maintenance for the Peabody Coal Company. At 31, the son of a then disabled coal miner and an elementary school teacher, and the father of three, he gave up his job to follow his dream of being a physician. His challenge, like that of Dr. Allen and Dr. Quang, was not the lack of intellect or the lack of desire, but that of opportunity. WVSOM gave each of them that opportunity. And now, the opportunity continues for Dr. Rorrer's son, Jay, who is a first year student at WVSOM. I believe Dr. Rorrer and Jay are here today. If they would stand, let's recognize them as well.

These stories, and so many more like them, are a testament to why we are here, providing opportunity for students to become physicians and fulfilling a need by improving the health care of our state and nation.

The late Paul Harvey presented a wonderful segment during his radio program called " The Rest of the Story" . There is a " Rest of the Story" for WVSOM. Many students that graduated from WVSOM have passed on their passion for, and commitment to, the School and their profession. Their shining example has filtered through to others including siblings, children and even grandchildren. Families like Apgar, Newell, Muscari, Wood, Harron, Ward, Petersen, Stewart

and Shy, to name a few, continue to build upon the heritage of this great school. WVSOM provides opportunity for generations of West Virginians and others seeking a way to make a difference. It is indeed quite extraordinary, and a testament to what we do here, to provide opportunity for students to pursue an osteopathic medical education.

### III.

As we continue our journey, we recognize that the environment in which we find ourselves in 2009 is in many ways quite different from that of the 1970s. Today, thanks to the work of so many, our School is on a sound footing and is thriving and advancing. This year, we will have about 200 graduates, compared to 33 in 1978. We are now the largest medical school in the State of West Virginia. The number of osteopathic medical schools in the country has grown from nine in 1974 to 25 today. They offer instruction at 32 locations in 22 states, and there are more colleges and branches planned. Osteopathic medicine is ever expanding in status and is recognized throughout the nation as fulfilling a significant need, especially in the area of primary care.

Yet challenges remain. In just 10 years there will be a shortage of 40,000 family physicians in the United States, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. A factor listed in this increase is 73 million Baby Boomers who will begin turning 65 in 2011. Family physicians, along with internists and pediatricians, will be in ever increasing demand to meet the growing need for medical services. Several areas of West Virginia are currently particularly hard hit by the lack of access to medical care, and without more primary care physicians, access to basic health care will be further restricted.

In addition, our current economy continues to adversely affect state funding, funding which for WVSOM was very low even before the economic crisis. To make up this gap in funding, our out of state tuition has been raised to an unsustainable level. Coupled with these challenges is a less than optimistic view by many of the future of the state of our economy and the uncertainty about the direction of health care reform.

These forces of a changing environment have been thrust upon us, and we must look creatively as to how to prepare for the future. Abraham Lincoln once said, “ You cannot escape the responsibility tomorrow, by evading it today” .

As we proceed into the future, we must capitalize on what has been our strength in the past and look for ways to develop our School to respond to the changing environment. Recently, the WVSOM Board of Governors and the Higher Education Policy Commission approved a new mission statement for our school. This mission statement incorporates what we do best at WVSOM; providing an outstanding educational experience for osteopathic medical students, and emphasizing our responsibility as a leader in graduates entering the primary care field of medicine. But the mission statement also paves the way for offering other health related programs complimentary to osteopathic medicine, and it emphasizes that we will strive to advance scientific knowledge through academic, clinical and basic science research; promoting patient-centered, evidence based medicine. Finally, the mission statement reaffirms our commitment to service to West Virginia.

Since my arrival on January 12, our faculty and staff have worked diligently to enhance the essential components necessary to meet our current challenges and prepare us for the future. It has not been easy, it has been a journey that involved the unwavering resolve, dedication and commitment of many, but these actions were necessary to effectuate advancement of our School.

These initiatives can be collectively grouped into three priorities; priorities that will be fundamental to our new strategic plan and will guide us on our future journey.

These priorities are:

Education and Student Development

Advancement of Knowledge

Service to West Virginia and beyond.

Our first priority is and will continue to be the education and success of our students. Our emphasis in Education and Student Development will continue to be rooted in our dedication to the philosophy and practice of osteopathic medicine. We will educate students for all specialties in all locations with emphasis on primary care in rural areas using the latest technology, the statewide campus experience, the post graduate doctoral training and the most current medical library resources. We will continue to produce highly competent primary care physicians for West Virginia and beyond. This is who we are and it has been our focus since our inception. Our students will learn patient centered, evidence based medicine, and develop lifelong learning and leadership skills in our caring family atmosphere. We will also provide additional complimentary academic programs such as a Masters in Public Health and a Masters in Medical Science.

Secondly, we will continue to advance knowledge by focusing on academic, clinical and basic science research, engaging our students in that research and building partnerships with other institutions. Examples of this focus are our new Center for West Virginia Rural Health Research, Disease Prevention and Treatment focusing on obesity and related diseases; and our collaborative work on grant proposals with WVU, Marshall, Concord and Shepherd universities.

Finally, we must promote and expand our dedication to service to West Virginia by continuing to provide primary care physicians to our state—currently 364 WVSOM graduates practice primary care in West Virginia. These and our other graduates by the very nature of their work, serve their communities every day, by treating the sick and providing medical services to those in need, whether or not the patients have the financial means to pay for the services. We must also grow our patient base and medical services through the Robert C. Byrd Clinic.

Graduating physicians and providing medical services are the traditional ways medical schools provide service.

We should do more! We must do more!

We will provide more service by utilizing our Statewide Campus sites and the new Clinical Evaluation Center to train medical providers in use of electronic medical records.

We will provide more service by focusing our research and outreach on the worse epidemic of our time, that of obesity and its related diseases. An epidemic that costs the American health care system \$147 billion dollars each year, that' s \$54 billion dollars more than all cancers combined. West Virginia is ranked second in the nation for obesity, and first in the nation for the related diseases of diabetes, heart attack and angina, so we have much work to do.

We will provide more service by acquiring and operating a Rural Outreach Vehicle and Emergency Responder (the ROVER ) to promptly react to disasters like the recent floods in West Virginia, to educate children and adults in preventative health care and to provide medical services with the appropriate certification to areas where there is no accessible health care for our citizens.

We will provide more service by continuing to promote to all within our school the importance of community service and involvement, modeled last year by our students providing over 8000 hours of community service.

We will provide more service by adding new academic programs and submitting and receiving more grants which will mean more students, employees and facilities, thus providing additional economic development for the Lewisburg community and the State, and additional economic vitality for our School.

And we will provide more service by partnering with our city, our county, universities and other entities to jointly serve our community and State.

We will do this not because it will enhance our reputation and status with West Virginia and beyond, but because service is a cornerstone of our mission and our existence.

I am convinced that our future will expand our reputation as a nationally renowned medical educational institution, known for its outstanding graduates, many focusing in primary care, and that it will include cutting edge research, education and treatment in obesity and other health disparities, and a compassionate response to the health care needs of our state and nation.

The greatness of this institution is achieved by understanding and acknowledging that who we are, and what we do, can never be taken for granted. We must continue our efforts to earn this prominence. Our journey, much like our state' s journey, has been one of struggle, a journey that involved the unwavering resolve, dedication and commitment by so many who supported the School throughout its remarkable history. The creation and development of this great institution has not been a task for those without commitment. It has been an aspiration for those with vision, devotion, resolve and hope for what can be.

Our journey is a story of people – men and women who have contributed so much to the rich heritage, that is, and that will be, of this institution. Challenges remain and will arise anew and as the keepers of this great heritage, we will continue to be guided by the principles that brought success to our founders. Principles that continue to be grounded in commitment, service, perseverance and hope.

Guided by these principles, we will overcome any future obstacles, resolved to meeting those challenges together as we realize our remarkable future.

I can think of no better calling in life than being associated with the education of medical students, and thus addressing one of the most critical needs in our society. All those linked with this School, the faculty, the staff, the graduates and our supporters, should take distinct pride in the work you do to better mankind. For me, this is much more than just a job, it is more than a responsibility; it is in a very real sense, the fulfillment of an intrinsic need to make a positive difference in this world.

Perhaps you have walked for many years upon this journey; perhaps you are joining us anew. I beseech you to consider carefully your participation in our journey.

And so, as we continue forward, I remain humbled by the task before us, grateful for the trust placed in me by each of you, and mindful of all that we must continue to become.

Tommye and I are blessed to be joining you and so many others on this great endeavor. I look forward to continuing to serve as the President of this outstanding School. Thank you for all that you have done, and all that you will do, as we continue our journey into what will certainly be, a Remarkable Future.