



# Health Matters

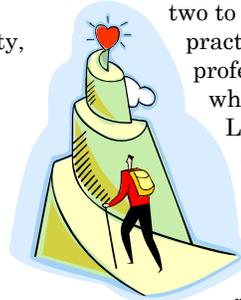
Great Smokies Medical Center of Asheville

A small, occasional publication

Volume 7, Issue 2

## Celebrating GSMC's 30th Birthday: 1979–2009

John L. Laird, M.D., had a big vision for the small clinic he started north of Asheville in 1979—to offer high quality, loving healthcare that brings true healing to the body, mind, and spirit. He couldn't have known then that there were other trails ahead for him to blaze. In 1991, he would become the first alternative physician in NC to fight the threatened loss of a medical license for administering chelation therapy, and he would then lead the way for passage of legislation to help protect all NC alternative medical doctors. Some of the legislators who heard Dr. Laird's testimony would later become his patients.



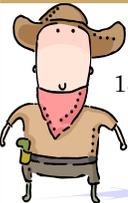
GSMC has grown from its original staff of two to having three practitioners and 16 professional and support staff who collectively carry Dr. Laird's vision forward.

GSMC is committed to providing individualized, low-risk healthcare services, integrating the least invasive and most effective mainstream and alternative treatments possible, identifying underlying triggers and causes of symptoms, and fostering an atmosphere conducive to laughter and fun for the benefit of patients and staff.

We extend heartfelt thanks for GSMC's vision to Dr. Laird and for its longevity to the many thousands of patients who have received healthcare here during the last 30 years, including those patients who first consulted Dr. Laird in 1979 and are still patients at GSMC.

We asked our practitioners to reflect on their combined 94 years of experience in healthcare on the occasion of GSMC's 30th birthday and to share with our readers a more personal look at the people who inspired them, the obstacles they see in the healthcare industry, any special interests they have in medicine, their self-care tips to stay healthy, and their interests outside of medicine.

### Dr. John L. Wilson, Jr.



Dr. Wilson has practiced medicine for 32 years, the last 18 of them at GSMC.

He has always been intrigued by science, in particular biology. He says a light bulb turned on for him

in eighth grade when his science teacher, Dick Veech, instilled the love of learning into an admittedly uninspired student.

Dr. Wilson was accepted into a medical school that successfully met its goal of training doctors who would practice in small towns by preselecting applicants based on academic criteria, interest in humanities, and psychological traits deemed suited for rural family practice.

In his junior year of med school, he was selected to participate in a rural associate program in which he was mentored by Roger MacDonald, M.D., the sole physician in a rural Minnesota county. Dr. MacDonald was a practical, empathic doctor and a skilled diagnostician whose ability to relate to and actively listen to patients still influences Dr. Wilson.

### Dr. Eileen M. Wright



Dr. Wright has practiced medicine for 33 years, the last 12 of them at GSMC.

She recalls first announcing to her family that she wanted

to be a doctor at age seven. That childhood conviction never faltered, and the same ability to focus on her goals still characterizes her life and career.

Despite her mother's saying that she had "never met a happy doctor," Dr. Wright went forward with her conviction, joining the U.S. Navy to avoid incurring debt from private medical school tuition. She would become the third woman in history to train in surgery at the Navy Hospital in Bethesda, MD.

Dr. Wright credits her professor of Oriental Philosophy, Dr. Kollar, for teaching her the benefits of laughing at herself and of thinking outside the box and with her heart. The rewards of this student/professor association still echo in her life today.

### Dr. Pamela A. Shuler



Dr. Shuler has practiced as a nurse practitioner for 29 years, the last five of them at GSMC.

Exemplifying the point that early experiences can impact children

throughout life, Dr. Shuler, a North Carolina native, recalls the influence of her maternal grandparents. They raised dairy and beef cattle, gardened extensively, and were "green before green was cool." Her grandmother was an avid reader of *Prevention* magazine and, as a result, Dr. Shuler first learned about the powerful roles of lifestyle, diet and nutritional supplements in supporting health and preventing disease in *Prevention's* pages.

Careers in nursing and, later, as a nurse practitioner were perfect fits for Dr. Shuler, given her love of science and natural healing practices, and also her generous spirit that is evident when she talks about "loving to help others help themselves."

## Dr. Wilson, cont.

Following residency, Dr. Wilson worked briefly for a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), where he learned firsthand that the influence of fiscally -motivated policies could be at odds with medical judgment. He has been in private practice since.

He has seen a large increase in patients' medical sophistication and knowledge and in their proactive participation in their own healthcare. He is an advocate for patients' freedom to access the type of healthcare that they deem best suited for themselves. He added that same freedom is under ongoing risk of being eroded by various fiscal, regulatory, and legislative influences and thus advises patients to be politically aware and active.

Asked what he sees as practical obstacles to delivering good healthcare, he said that short patient appointments leave physicians without enough time to get to know their patients, contributing to reported high levels of unhappiness and job dissatisfaction among physicians and to patients' not feeling heard or cared for.

Asked what interests him in medicine, he said he enjoys helping solve medical puzzles for patients who have not yet found answers for their health concerns, plus identifying hidden causes and contributors of illness, including allergic reactions, underlying immunological mechanisms, and toxic influences. He also enjoys positively impacting the future of autistic children.

When treating chronic illness, Dr. Wilson prefers to support the body's natural healing capabilities and to minimize the use of medication.

He advises people to protect their health by identifying any lifestyle contributors to their ailments, learning healthy ways to de-stress, reducing exposures to toxins, eating lots of fresh, colorful vegetables daily, and finding time to have fun.

Dr. Wilson enjoys playing bluegrass and old time fiddle, riding his Harley, going to Asheville Tourist games, and learning about Revolutionary War and Civil War history. He and his wife, Connie, enjoy a 32-year marriage full of laughter and good conversation.

Dr. Wilson continues to be inspired by life and people, not uncommonly his patients. Looking to the future, he says, "I don't even think in terms of retirement. I just love what I do."

## Dr. Wright, cont.

Dr. Wright's mother advised her: "Treat your patients as if they were your mother, father, brother, or sister and you will have a good practice."

Following a 17-year career in Emergency Medicine, Dr. Wright changed her practice to match her increasingly holistic orientation. She began a course of study in mind/body-based Eastern and Western medical practices, including acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Ayurvedic medicine, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

Now, at GSMC, Dr. Wright partners with her patients as a facilitator and teacher, takes the time needed to address the nature and causes of her patients' health concerns, and continues to pursue many interests in medicine. She knows that the elusive, metaphorical "magic pill" that many seek to fix them is, in fact, seldom actually a pill.

Asked about politics of medicine, she said, "As long as medicine is financially intertwined with the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, our healthcare system will be an 'illness care system'."

Dr. Wright advises patients to care for their emotional, physical, and spiritual health by eating a healthy diet, finding physical activity that they can enjoy daily, relaxing their bodies *and* minds daily (even for only five to 10 minutes to start and gradually increasing the time), and developing a spiritual practice that sustains them.

Consistent with her history of studying medical advances in depth, Dr. Wright has most recently spent 5-plus years researching the evolving treatment of behavioral disorders and mood and sleep disturbances through measuring neurochemistry markers and then balancing any imbalanced markers using amino acids, herbs, fatty acids, and nutrient co-factors. Dr. Wright's patients reap the benefits from her role as consultant for the company doing this ground-breaking research.

She finds her lifelong passion for studying truly fulfilling. Together, she and her husband, Michael, especially enjoy traveling, whether it is hiking in the mountains, walking on the beach, or exploring new towns, cities, and sights in the U.S. and abroad.



## Dr. Shuler, cont.

As a doctoral student in nursing science from 1987-1991, Dr. Shuler helped establish and served as Clinical Coordinator of Safe Harbor Women's Clinic, a healthcare facility that she set up in a homeless shelter in Los Angeles. She also had integral roles in developing similar clinics in Hazard, KY, Cherokee, NC, and another one in Los Angeles. All four clinics still care for the medically underserved today.

Dr. Shuler serves on the faculty of the NC Center for Advancement of Teaching (NCCAT), where she teaches NC teachers how to protect their health and reduce their stress levels.

Dr. Shuler has extensive experience in women's health care, including the treatment of menopausal symptoms (with nutrients, herbs, and bio-identical hormones), PMS, osteoporosis, yeast overgrowth, digestive disorders, breast diseases, adrenal fatigue, and stress.

Asked what advice she has for people practicing self-care, she says that a program of regular exercise and sound dietary choices can allay many health problems, including stress. She knows of what she speaks—she is easily physically active and makes good food choices now, though developing these habits took time and patience. Dr. Shuler also finds value in having faith for a positive future.

Looking to medicine's future, she hopes to see expansion of energetic approaches and more tolerance of medical diversity.

During her career, Dr. Shuler has seen increased familiarity with and acceptance of nurse practitioners' roles. She anticipates that nurse practitioners will continue to fill a unique niche in clinical practice by drawing on the rich history of nursing's holistic roots and nurse practitioners' clinical skills.

Pam and her husband of 33 years, Keith, are active in animal rescue and enjoy expanding their self-sufficient life skills through organic gardening, alternative energy exploration, and food preservation. They also enjoy art galleries, museums, music, road trips, camping, hiking, state fairs, gatherings with family and friends, and immersion in all of nature's beauty and sounds.



**All content in this newsletter is intended to be informational and is not to be taken as medical advice or to replace medical care.**