

Service to others defines 2008 honorees for Wisconsin Medical Society Physician Citizens of the Year

Steve Busalacchi

For most hard-working people, retirement is a time to exhale from a busy work life and relax a bit. But James Allen, MD, a retired ophthalmologist from Madison, chose another route. Doctor Allen not only contributes professionally to Wisconsin Medical Society activities, but he chose to embark on a long, challenging and ultimately successful quest to convince the US Congress to do the right thing on behalf of blind veterans.

And while Scott Walker, MD, of Fennimore, is not retired, he is cut from the same cloth as Dr Allen. In addition to his full-time medical practice, Dr Walker serves as medical director of a free clinic. He inspires his patients and his colleagues alike in his selfless dedication to serving those in need.

Perhaps you now have a better idea of why the Wisconsin Medical Society was unable to select just 1 doctor to honor for humanitarian service this year. The Physician Citizen of the Year Award has traditionally been bestowed upon 1 physician who demonstrates a commitment to his or her community through volunteer or charitable activities.

“[But] we had a good problem this time in selecting our 2008 Physician Citizen of the Year,” said outgoing Wisconsin Medical Society President Clarence P. Chou, MD, at the April 11 presentation ceremony in Madison. “There were too many fine candidates.”

Allen sees an injustice

Doctor Allen learned that one of his patients who had recently lost vision in his remaining eye after previously suffering total vision loss while serving

in the U.S. military would not receive additional benefits. He saw a need and began investigating what could be done about this, seeking the help of Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin.

“The 7-year journey we are here to commemorate, known as the Dr. James C. Allen Veteran Vision

“It was very motivating to get a tangible reminder that the Wisconsin Medical Society cares about serving the underserved. If I can show direction and provide ideas for involvement, perhaps more people will pick up the lead and move forward.”

— Scott Walker, MD

Equity Act, was not the result of partisan bickering or cable pundits duking it out,” said Baldwin aide Brett Watson, during a May 6 presentation before the Dane County Medical Society, “but rather a testament to American democracy and the perseverance of 1 caring and informed person to create change from the bottom-up.”

Doctor Allen is responsible for helping to change federal law so disabled veterans who lost their vision in one eye because of their military service may get enhanced benefits should they lose vision later in the other eye.

“Doctor Allen can truly be said to be the one person behind this new law. Furthermore, he always has been a model of the public-spirited physician,” said Jay Gold, MD, of Madison, who nominated Dr Allen for the award. “I believe Dr Allen provides a model to the medical community of how physicians



Family physician Scott Walker, MD, of Boscobel was named a 2008 Physician Citizen of the Year for his work establishing and running a free clinic.



James Allen, MD, a retired ophthalmologist, accepts one of two 2008 Physician Citizen of the Year Awards from Clarence P. Chou, MD, at the Wisconsin Medical Society Annual Meeting. Also pictured is Thomas Luetzow, MD. Doctor Allen was the force behind the Dr. James C. Allen Veteran Vision Equity Act.

can dedicate themselves to the common good over and above the good they do in direct clinical care.”

As Dr Chou said during the formal awards presentation, “Doctor Allen may be a formally retired ophthalmologist, but he’s never stopped working on behalf of patients.”

Walking the talk

Scott Walker, MD, also goes beyond providing compassionate care to his patients, but to residents who can’t afford to be traditional patients, as well. Doctor Walker, who practices family medicine, allergy, and obstetrics at Bluff Street Clinic-Boscobel, saw the increasing need in the community for a free clinic and took charge of the effort to establish and manage it.

Doctor Walker wasted no time in delving into this enterprise shortly after he began practicing at the clinic in 2006. He immediately began work with a group of dedicated volunteers to secure access to health care for uninsured patients.

“Doctors like Scott Walker help keep our health care system functional, as we try to reform it so we may more effectively serve patients,” said Dr Chou. “Achieving health system reform has proven to be a difficult challenge indeed, but we are inspired

to keep working at it because of the dedication of physicians like Dr Walker who roll up their sleeves and treat those in need rather than waiting for politicians to reach an agreement. That level of decency, generosity and empathy cannot be overstated.”

Doctor Walker is equally admired by his partners in Boscobel. “Doctor Walker has a real passion for the uninsured,” said Kurt Wilhelm, MD. “In fact, Scott was one of the first guys to sign up and volunteer. He’s really championed the cause.”

Doctor Walker is quick to share credit for the clinic’s success. “At first, (the attention) was a bit embarrassing as it was a whole lot of people who made the free clinic possible, and this award should be shared many ways,” he said, adding that the In Health Community Wellness Free Clinic went “from nothing to doors open in 6 months,” largely due to the fundraising acumen of Robin Transo, a retired school teacher and community activist.

“It was very motivating to get a tangible reminder that the Wisconsin Medical Society cares about serving the underserved,” said Dr Walker. “If I can show direction and provide ideas for involvement, perhaps more people will pick up the lead and move forward.”

advancing the art & science of medicine in the midwest

WMJ

WMJ (ISSN 1098-1861) is published through a collaboration between The Medical College of Wisconsin and The University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. The mission of *WMJ* is to provide an opportunity to publish original research, case reports, review articles, and essays about current medical and public health issues.

© 2008 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

Visit www.wmjonline.org to learn more.