

Beyond the Clinic: Making a Difference in the Lives of Others

Kay Simmons

There are some people who do more for others than seems possible given the number of hours in each day. Physicians are some of the busiest people around, working long hours to care for their patients, and yet some have the time and energy to reach out beyond the walls of their clinic or hospital to impact the health and well-being of those in their community, and in some cases, the state or nation.

Two physicians who have made significant differences in the lives of others are Paul Durbin, MD, of Racine, and Timothy Westlake, MD, of Oconomowoc, who were recipients of the Wisconsin Medical Society's 2017 Physician Citizen of the Year Award.

Paul Durbin, MD

Doctor Durbin, an internal medicine physician who practices with Ascension in Racine, was nominated for the award for his "exceptional kind and compassionate care, not only for his patients in clinic, but anyone he meets in the community."

In her nomination, colleague Kimberly Leslie called Dr Durbin a huge advocate for Racine's homeless community, noting that he volunteers monthly at the local homeless shelter. But she said what motivated her the most to nominate Dr Durbin for this award was his involvement with Convoy of Hope, an organization headquartered in Missouri that brings together local churches, businesses, community services and health care organizations for one-day events that provide residents in need with groceries, medical and dental screenings, haircuts, children's shoes,

job and career services, family portraits and more—at no charge.

Doctor Durbin's volunteerism began with his upbringing. It was the example of his parents, whom he said had a passion for serving the poor, and especially the homeless, that led him to want to serve the homeless in his community. When Dr Durbin and his family moved

story, and so many others, moved Dr Durbin so much that he wrote a letter to Convoy of Hope to see if they would host an event in Racine.

It took two years of planning and organizing to pull the community together for the event, which was held at Walden School on September 17, 2016. Doctor Durbin recruited his church to be the host church and volunteered to set up

“As physician community leaders we have influence over others and can have a positive impact in the community using our knowledge and expertise. Ask yourself, ‘what can I give back to my community?’ Be willing to donate your time.”

—Paul Durbin, MD

to Racine they wanted to volunteer as a family, and when they learned about the Homeless Assistance Leadership Organization (HALO) through their church they began volunteering once a month serving meals and providing music at the shelter.

In 2013, a friend's church in Kenosha was hosting an event with Convoy of Hope, and the friend asked Dr Durbin if he would be willing to help in the health service area. During that day a young man had a routine blood sugar finger stick that would not stop bleeding. He was referred to a hematologist and eventually diagnosed with a bleeding disorder, which six months later ultimately saved his life when he had emergency surgery. That young man's

and run the medical services. He also helped recruit the over 800 volunteers who worked at the event and helped fundraise the \$35,000 it took to put on the event, all of which came from area organizations and donors.

A variety of services, all free of charge, were provided to the 2,383 event participants. Services included 180 haircuts and 250 family portraits. Nearly 500 women were seen in the National Breast Cancer Foundation tent; over 1,500 pairs of shoes were distributed, 35,000 to 40,000 pounds of groceries and 12,000 Plum Organic products were given out, and 1,904 people were prayed over in the Connections Tent.

One hundred sixty people took advantage

of a multitude of services provided by 121 volunteers from Ascension All Saints, including adult medicine, pediatrics, family medicine, cardiology, psychiatry, podiatry, physical therapy, dermatology, massage therapy, counseling, hearing, vision, blood pressure and blood sugar screenings, and flu shots. Participants received patient education for a variety of conditions and appropriate follow-up was arranged for the majority of the patients, many who did not have a doctor.

It was “an absolutely spectacular day, totally worth all the time and effort,” said Dr Durbin. “The people I talked to who were there loved the event. The stories poured in of people who came to the event with needs, and came away with hope and dignity. Each guest was treated as a human being, made in the image of God, valued and treasured.”

Despite being a such a huge undertaking, Dr Durbin said there is a lot of interest in putting on the event again. He felt that he and the other organizers learned a lot and developed excellent partnerships, but given what it takes to organize, it will most likely by three to five years before it can happen.

“I think it’s clear Dr Durbin is a true champion for his patients and his community who exemplifies what we’re looking for in a physician citizen of the year,” said John Hartman, MD, vice chair of the Society’s Board of Directors when presenting Dr Durbin with the award.

Reflecting on his time spent at the homeless shelter and volunteering with and coordinating Convoy of Hope events, Dr Durbin said, “As physician community leaders we have influence over others and can have a positive impact in the community using our knowledge and expertise. Ask yourself, ‘What can I give back to my community?’ Be willing to donate your time. Look at what’s in your community and what volunteer opportunities are available in which you could give your time.”

Tim Westlake, MD

Doctor Westlake is an emergency medicine physician who is the emergency department director at Oconomowoc Memorial Hospital. In addition to his emergency medicine work,



Paul Durbin, MD, of Racine, and Timothy Westlake, MD, of Oconomowoc, were honored with the Wisconsin Medical Society’s 2017 Physician Citizen of the Year Awards for their efforts to improve health in their communities and state—beyond the clinic.

Dr Westlake has dedicated himself to opioid reform efforts in Wisconsin and the nation.

Colleague Michael McNett, MD, said he nominated him for the award because of Dr Westlake’s “commitment to addressing the prescription opioid abuse epidemic and expanding medication-assisted treatment throughout Wisconsin, resulting in Wisconsin being a paragon for all states.”

Doctor Westlake said his passion and involvement in the opioid reform efforts began when he was appointed to the Medical Examining Board (MEB) in 2012.

“I wanted to be able to contribute to policy and have a voice in medical rule making with

an emphasis on trying to rein in what I saw as over-regulation. I saw the critical importance of the people who are being regulated having a say in what the regulations actually were,” he said.

In 2013, Dr Westlake’s work in the opioid arena began when he took on the role of the MEB’s Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) liaison. For Dr Westlake, this was a natural fit because he saw the PDMP as a valuable tool he used daily as an emergency medicine physician, and he wanted to be able to guide its implementation.

Not long afterward Dr Westlake became Wisconsin team leader for the National

Governors' Association (NGA) Best Practice Policy Academy for Reducing Prescription Drug Abuse. While attending the NGA policy academy, he said he quickly realized the importance of taking a leadership role when, in a room of over 200 people working to craft the policies that would legislate and regulate opioid prescribing, he was the only person who actually prescribed them.

“I saw that there was going to be legislation and regulation in prescription opioid reform, and I saw that it would best be guided by someone who is in the trenches, actively practicing medicine and prescribing opioids on a regular basis.”

—*Tim Westlake, MD*

“I saw that there was going to be legislation and regulation in prescription opioid reform, and I saw that it would best be guided by someone who is in the trenches, actively practicing medicine and prescribing opioids on a regular basis,” he said.

Doctor Westlake's work with the Wisconsin NGA team led to the idea for the enhanced PDMP (ePDMP). The team saw that getting the highest quality PDMP data and analytics to physicians in the quickest, least energy-consuming way possible was a must. Doctor Westlake challenged the managing director of the Wisconsin PDMP to build a new PDMP with the goal of seamless integration with the electronic medical record. What was created was beyond his expectations and is a national model for what is the ultimate expression of what a PDMP can be.

“I have been serving as the only physician on the Wisconsin ePDMP Design Team Executive Committee, and I'm proud to have been able to contribute from inception through implementation,” he said.

After coming back from the NGA policy academy in 2014, Dr Westlake connected with Wisconsin State Representative John Nygren, who has been a leader in creating legislation to address the opioid crisis in Wisconsin. At the

same time, Attorney General Brad Schimel had made addressing the opioid epidemic a plank of his policy agenda. Working together, they all agreed that what was needed was nothing less than a change in the culture of prescribing. With the help of Dr McNett, Rep Nygren, and Attorney General Schimel, the Wisconsin Health System Coalition for Prescription Drug Abuse Reduction was created to engage health

systems and networks of physicians and prescribers to embed the cultural change within the fabric of medical practice, as well as increasing the availability of medication assisted treatment.

In addition to state-level legislative efforts, Dr Westlake reached out to US senators with ideas on legislation that could make an impact nationally. He worked with Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson on the Promoting Responsible Opioid Prescribing—or PROP Act—which unthethered pain quality metrics from Medicare reimbursement, effectively ending the federal mandate of the pain scale. He also worked on sharing the Wisconsin opioid reform strategy with Senator Tammy Baldwin, who crafted Title IX of the recently enacted CARA Act, known as the Jason Simcakoski Memorial and Promise Act, which models the prescription opioid reforms in the Department of Veterans Affairs on Wisconsin reforms.

Along with all his other activities, Dr Westlake represents the MEB as its appointed member of the Controlled Substance Board (CSB). The CSB oversees the ePDMP and does all the scheduling of controlled substances for the state. Last year Dr Westlake saw an opportunity to develop catch-all fentanyl-related substance/analog language that would sched-

ule all possible yet undeveloped fentanyl analogs with one law. He worked with State Representative Joel Kleefisch on the state version, which has been signed into law, and with Sen Johnson on the federal version, introduced as the Stopping Overdoses of Fentanyl Analogs (SOFA) Act.

“Thanks in no small part to these collaborative efforts and others, we are beginning to see real changes that are leading to positive outcomes for our patients and our communities, and for that, we honor him,” said Dr Hartman when he presented Dr Westlake with the Society's Physician Citizen of the Year Award.

Although Dr Westlake's dedication and hard work have led to legislation and reforms that promise to have a lasting impact on the opioid epidemic in Wisconsin and in the nation, he reminds his fellow physicians and other health care professionals that everyone can make a difference.

“Stay educated, stay engaged—the lion's share of the work happens when we educate ourselves, and more importantly our patients, in treating the cause of the pain, and not using treatments with little proven benefit but high potential risk.

“I lecture for a community educational program called ‘Stairway to Heroin,’ and my take-home point to the high school families is POP=H. Prescription opioid pills are the same thing as heroin/opium. If we as physicians have a similar understanding and respect/fear of opioids, then our prescribing would go back to where it used to be. There are times when prescribing opioids is appropriate, just as there always have been times when opium was appropriate, but we really all need to be self-circumspect with our prescribing habits.”

• • •

Editor's Note: Awarded annually, the Wisconsin Medical Society's Physician Citizen of the Year award recognizes physicians who have volunteered their time and talents to improve their communities. It honors recipients for civic, economic, and charitable services they provide beyond their regular practice.

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.

© 2017 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System and The Medical College of Wisconsin, Inc.

Visit www.wmjonline.org to learn more.