

Reflections on Wear the White Coat



The first Wear the White Coat program took place in July 2011, with an invited group of 28 leading business and community leaders shadowing physicians in their offices. The Greater Louisville Medical Society created the program to give professionals insight into the world of health care through the eyes of physicians and to build relationships that result in improved health and wellness for Louisville. The next class will participate in Wear the White Coat in February. Here, two participants from the inaugural class share their experiences.

STEVE BARGER

Wear the White Coat was an interesting and informative experience, especially so as I was a participant in the GLMS Mini-Internship Program years ago. Both programs were well-done, with the mini-internship more procedure-oriented. I was in the operating room for numerous surgeries, spent time with a pediatric cardiologist as he performed an ultrasound on an expectant mother and finished by observing a colonoscopy. Wear the White Coat offered some of the same but with more of a big-picture view of the medical profession. The opportunity to engage in discussions on health care as opposed to medical care and to be presented with "where-the-rubber-meets-the-road practice concerns" by community physicians was invaluable.

As we entered the opening session, a real-time open heart surgery was showing on a large monitor. As we viewed the surgery, several medical instruments were passed around and, as a union carpenter who served an apprenticeship more than 40 years ago, I was struck by their similarity to the drill motors and templates used on construction projects. However, they were just a bit smaller and stainless instead of heavy plastic, and the sponge was a lot smaller than the ones used to clean tile grout.

During lunch, we had an opportunity to network with our fellow participants and meet our physician preceptor, scheduling time to experience a small flavor of their medical practice. *Voice-Tribune* Staff Writer Ashley Anderson and I were fortunate to have Dr. James Patrick Murphy as our physician preceptor. We

were immediately impressed with his energy and enthusiasm for the practice of medicine coupled with his concern for people.

Several days later, we spent the morning with Dr. Murphy and his associates – starting the day with the administrator of Murphy Pain Center, who provided an overview of the impact that regulations, insurance and record retention have on the day-to-day operations of a medical practice.

Then we were on to join Dr. John Stocking and other associates of Murphy Pain Center as they counseled the day's patients, performing medical procedures aimed at improving their patients' quality of life. Dr. Murphy spent a good portion of our time together articulating the concerns of the medical profession, clearly showing his understanding of health care in our community.

The closing dinner was a real treat with Wear the White Coat participants and physicians commenting not only on the program, but how to better connect the medical community with the population it serves.

I'm glad the Greater Louisville Medical Society is continuing this type of community outreach and involvement. It is good for physicians, their patients and the community as a whole. **L**_M

Note: Steve Barger is the managing member of Steve Barger Consulting LLC.



Steve Barger (right) talks health care with Bryan A. Loy, MD, chair of the GLMS Community Connections Committee, during Wear the White Coat.

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MARIA G. HAMPTON

Louisville is fortunate to be home to a vibrant health care sector. Institutions like the University of Louisville Hospital, Norton Healthcare, Jewish Hospital & St. Mary's HealthCare, Baptist Healthcare System and Humana have been cornerstones of the regional economy for decades. This is not surprising when you look at broader trends. Nationally, the impact of the health care sector on the U.S. economy has grown over the years. Health expenditures have increased from about 14 percent of the nation's total gross domestic product to about 17 percent over the past decade, according to estimates by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.¹

While we are familiar with the large medical facilities mentioned above, there exists a dynamic and thriving industry of small medical businesses in Louisville, too. Through the Wear the White Coat program, I had the opportunity to meet several of the entrepreneurial physicians who run these businesses. By participating in this program, I gained a new appreciation for the "small business" segment of the medical community and its approach to both the medical and economic bottom line.

The Louisville metropolitan statistical area (which includes parts of Southern Indiana) had more than 3,000 office-based physicians in 2009, according to a January 2011 report by the Lewin Group, a health care policy research and management consulting firm. The office-based physician practices supported more than 17,000 jobs and a total payroll of roughly \$2.6 billion that year. They also generated about \$176 million in taxes for the state and local economies, the Lewin Group says.² As these figures show, the office-based physician industry has an important local presence in our community.

The medical professionals whom I met during the program possessed a variety of skill sets, technical expertise and educational backgrounds. Some of them were traditional MDs or RNs, while others were technical professionals who trained at a variety of institutions – universities, community colleges and technical schools.

As I soon came to realize, however, education for the physician entrepreneurs includes more than medical training. It also includes learning how to manage payroll and cash flows – "musts" for any successful small business. The learning continues every day, as these entrepreneurs find out about their patients' socioeconomic environment and its impact on their overall health. These doctors must be more than physicians; they must also be business managers, counselors and experts at navigating the complex world of medical insurance and reimbursement.

During the program, I had the opportunity to wear my white coat and shadow Dr. Lara Fakunle with Endocrine & Diabetes Associates. I watched her balance the individual needs of her patients and the bottom line of the business. In many cases, her patients had cut their prescribed doses of medicine to save money, which certainly was not good for their health. Dr. Fakunle had to deal with these issues, provide appropriate care and maximize the number of patients served to earn the revenue needed by a volume-sensitive medical practice. She does all of this each day while adapting to the changing tech-

nology in the industry and a changing regulatory environment. After spending the morning with Dr. Fakunle, I appreciated her intensity, her caring and her energy, and I was amazed at the productivity of all of the practice's professionals who must operate in such a complex environment.

With the Wear the White Coat program, I expected to walk away with a deeper understanding of the medical side of the office-based physician enterprise. What I didn't expect were the additional insights I gained, including an awareness of the vast skill sets required for a successful practice and how these types of businesses contribute to the overall health and economic vitality of the Louisville community.

At the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, we seek to understand the many industries that drive the economies of the communities we serve. As the senior branch executive of the Louisville office, I have a particular interest in understanding the health care industry and other industries that operate within my branch zone.

To help us in this effort, the St. Louis Fed has created four industry councils. The councils represent industries that are critical to the Eighth Federal Reserve District – agribusiness, health care, real estate and transportation. Council members, who are industry representatives from throughout the district, share with Fed staff information on economic conditions in their specific industry.

As the facilitator of the health care industry council, which is based in Louisville, I look forward to sharing my Wear the White Coat experience with members of the council and with my colleagues at the Fed. I want to thank the Greater Louisville Medical Society for giving me this opportunity.

References

1. OECD Health Data 2011 (<http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SHA>).
2. The Lewin Group. "The Economic Impact of Office-Based Physicians in Kentucky," State Report, January 2011. Prepared for the American Medical Association. Prepared by SNR Denton & The Lewin Group Inc. L_M

Note: Maria G. Hampton is the vice president and senior branch executive of the Louisville Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. She serves on the Norton Healthcare Board of Trustees.



Maria G. Hampton (right) shadowed Lara O. Fakunle, MD, in the office.