

SOONER SPOTLIGHT • G. Rainey Williams

G. Rainey Williams and his staff train good surgeons. At least that's the opinion of his former students and physicians who have had the opportunity to observe OU-trained surgeons at work.

One Oklahoma City-area physician went so far as to say, "If I ever have surgery, I hope it's performed by a surgeon Rainey Williams trained."

Williams himself admits modestly that OU has a "pretty good program" in surgery. Its success, he maintains, is due to a first-rate surgical faculty, very good students who train under them and more recently, to an excellent facility.

The OU Department of Surgery, which Williams has chaired since 1974, is entrusted with training physicians specializing in general surgery and with the initial training of surgeons who enter surgical sub-specialties such as pediatric or plastic surgery. In addition, every third-year medical student is required to take nine weeks of surgery, and some fourth-year students take an elective in surgery.

Each year, six newly graduated physicians of the 75 to 100 who apply are accepted as surgical residents. The OU program is designed to give these residents increasing responsibility each year of their training, so that during their final year they perform independently a great many operations.

However, Williams tries to instill more than just the knowledge and skill necessary to perform surgical procedures. He believes that with the high technology of today's medicine, physicians easily can find themselves concentrating on diseases and forgetting about human beings — something he will not tolerate in OU-trained physicians.

"We stress to our students and residents," the Georgia-born surgeon says with a soft drawl, "that their patients are frightened, sick people asking for help.

"When I was in medical school," Williams continues, "it seemed very clear to me that surgeons dealt largely with identifiable problems for which there were finite answers. Surgeons can identify problems and do something about them. To me, that's beautiful."

The special training that enables physicians to solve some patients' problems by surgical intervention brings with it tremendous responsibility. To prepare for assuming that responsibility, the OU surgical residents have five to six years of training under Williams and the other surgical faculty.

Residents spend those years observing and assisting faculty surgeons and performing countless surgeries under faculty supervision. The faculty and residents spend a great deal of time discussing each patient before surgery, then carefully studying each patient's post-operative course. And they discuss the deaths when they occur.

"I don't think surgeons or any other physicians ever get used to losing patients," Williams says emphatically. "Death becomes tolerable to them only when they are convinced they've done the best that could be done for their patients."

In spite of the occasional grim disappointments associated with surgery, Williams has never regretted his career choice. He likes surgery, and he likes training surgeons.



OU College of Medicine's Dr. G. Rainey Williams

"I think surgery relieves more human complaints than any other area of medicine," Williams maintains.

Williams, who received his surgical training at Johns Hopkins, came to Oklahoma City to join the OU College of Medicine faculty in 1954. Since that time, the college and his adopted city have benefited greatly from his presence. His involvement in Oklahoma City civic activities is well known, and he has long been recognized as a spokesperson and advocate of the medical college.

He has served the college in many ways, including terms as interim dean and chief of staff of what was then University Hospital. He has represented OU with distinction in a host of professional organizations, serving terms as president of the Oklahoma Surgical Association, the Southern Surgical Association and three terms on the Board of Governors for the American College of Surgeons.

Undeniably, however, Rainey Williams' greatest contribution is as teacher and role model for the young men and women who are with him for part of their medical education. They do not soon forget his quiet manner, his devotion to the practice of medicine and his total commitment to the welfare of the patients who come under his care.

—JUDITH WALL