

Medical Mentors In Rural Oklahoma

BY JUDITH WALL OU Public Affairs ■ PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR



Preceptorships in small communities pair OU med students with physicians eager to share their career experience.



Fourth-year medical student Jeff Garrett is tired. “But it’s been a remarkable week,” he says with obvious enthusiasm.

During the first week of a month-long rural preceptorship in the Pauls Valley hospital, Garrett has helped deliver a baby, sewn up numerous lacerations and cared for post-operative patients. He also has assisted in the diagnosis and treatment of patients and the resuscitation of four patients in cardiac arrest.

“The first night I was here, I didn’t sleep at all,” Garrett says. “One of Dr. Lindsey’s patients wasn’t doing well. We were concerned that she wasn’t going to make it through the night.”

Garrett has been learning by doing under the supervision of Dr. Jim Lindsey and other local physicians.

“I hang out in the ER when I’m not needed upstairs,” he adds. The son of a Lawton surgeon, Garrett expresses amazement at how busy the Pauls Valley hospital is, how many sick people he has seen, how many surgeries are performed.

“Most students are surprised that major things can occur in a small community,” explains Dr. James Brand, OU associate professor of family medicine and director of the rural preceptorship program. “Surgeons from regional medical centers often operate in the hospitals, with the patient staying in the home community for post-operative care. Radiologists come in regularly. Obstetrical care is usually provided in the community.”

The Pauls Valley General Hospital is one of 26 sites across the state participating in the OU College of Medicine Rural Medicine Preceptorship Program, with 125 state physicians serving as preceptors or associate preceptors. Every fourth-year medical student is required to spend a month in a non-metropolitan state community under the tutelage of an experienced physician.

Founded in 1946, the OU preceptorship program is one of the oldest such programs in the nation. It was created to provide students with an understanding of the limitations and benefits of practice in a non-urban setting.

The OU Department of Family and Preventive Medicine administers the program, and most of the preceptors practice family medicine. Four are internists, and one is a pediatrician. Jim Lindsey is the only general surgeon, but he also treats

■ With Dr. Jim Lindsey supervising, Jeff Garrett, center, prepares to suture the hand of Lexington truck driver Kerry Jones.



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preceptee has moved in, they start calling,” Garrett says.

In the morning, Garrett makes rounds with Lindsey and writes orders. He scrubs in on Lindsey’s surgeries. And he soaks up Lindsey’s words like a sponge.

Jim Lindsey is the consummate teacher, always explaining, always encouraging. He shares with his young charges what his associate Dr. Charles N. Howard Jr. calls

“Lindseyisms,” explaining tricks of the trade that he has learned during four decades of practice. (For example: When attaching a drain tube, wire sutures grip the plastic better than gut or nylon sutures.)

While waiting for a surgery to begin, Lindsey explains in great detail the procedure he will use to perform a partial mastectomy. Garrett listens intently, occasionally asking questions. The rapport between teacher and student is apparent.

“There’s nothing that I don’t discuss with Dr. Lindsey,” Garrett says. “I call him every night, and we talk about every patient.”

“The students get a good experience here,”

Lindsey says. “With supervision, they have the opportunity to make some decisions on their own. They have to think a bit and not always wait for someone to tell them what to do.”

Lindsey says that over the years, most of his students have been energetic and knowledgeable. “I’m quite proud of the product the OU medical school puts out.”

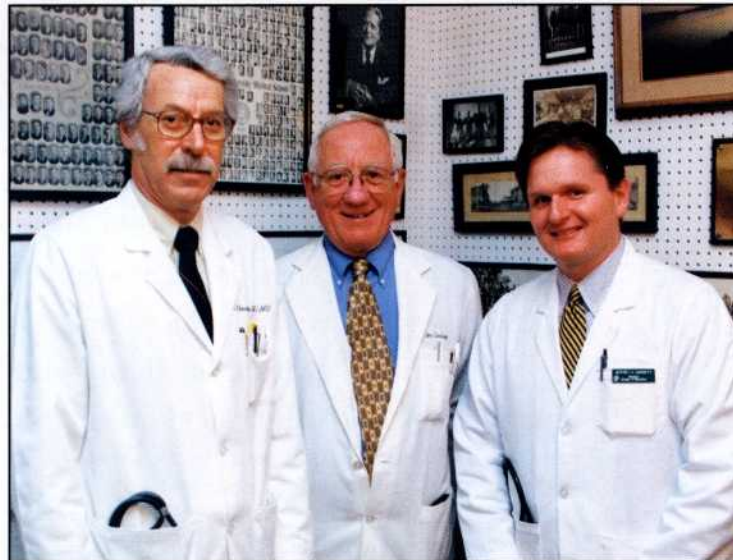
When asked why he has continued

general medicine patients.

“In a small town, the surgeon usually takes care of his own diabetes and pulmonary problems,” Lindsey explains. “My preceptees are exposed to a lot of different things.”

In most hospital settings, medical students look on while interns, residents and attending physicians actually treat the patient. Lindsey and his fellow preceptors in rural hospitals across the state provide opportunities for students to be involved in patient care and experience a degree of autonomy for the first time.

Pauls Valley is an especially popular site for medical students who, like Garrett, have an interest in entering a surgery residency when they graduate. As a result, Lindsey usually is assigned a preceptee each of the nine months of the year the program is in operation. “The students who come here get to first assist,” he explains, adding that in a major metropolitan hospital, medical students stand three



■ Above: Dr. Jim Lindsey, center, introduces his new preceptee, Jeff Garrett, right, to Dr. Charles N. Howard Jr., who served a preceptorship under Lindsey in 1976 and now practices with his former mentor in Pauls Valley.

■ At top: Jeff and Shannon Garrett, at left with their three children, join Jim and Judy Lindsey for lunch at Bob’s Pig Shop, a Pauls Valley landmark.

or four back in the operating room.

Like most OU preceptees, Garrett is living at the hospital during his stay in the community, which means he is usually the first of the medical staff on the scene when there is a cardiac arrest—with the emergency room physician arriving shortly thereafter. The nurses also call Garrett if any of Lindsey’s patients are having problems. “Once the nurses know a



■ During morning hospital rounds, Garrett and Lindsey check on 99-year-old Maude Fitzgerald, who is making a remarkable recovery from emergency surgery. Lindsey recalls that the spunky rural Maysville resident shot a rattlesnake one week after undergoing open-heart surgery at age 91.

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Courtesy of Jim Lindsey

■ Passing down the medical tradition is second nature to Dr. Jim Lindsey, whose grandfather, Dr. Harvey Lindsey, is shown here fording a creek on his way to a house call in early-day Pauls Valley. Dr. Jim's father, Dr. Ray Lindsey, was one of the founding preceptors for the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine.

to be involved with the program all these years, the amiable physician answers with a big smile. "Because I love it, and I'm bored when I don't have one of these guys around," he says, patting Garrett's arm.

"The students help me take care of my patients," he adds, "and I learn as much from them as they do from me. They bring up things that are going on at the University that I might not yet be cognizant of, especially general medicine issues since most of my study and the medical meetings I attend are oriented toward surgery."

Lindsey considers his participation in the program an opportunity to give back to his profession and to the University of Oklahoma. Although he graduated from medical school at Northwestern University in Chicago—the alma mater of his father, Dr. Ray Lindsey—Jim Lindsey earned his undergraduate degree at OU and considers himself a loyal Sooner.

While at Northwestern, he received special permission to serve two preceptorships under his father in Pauls Valley. He is proud that the community has set the state record for

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2000 Academic Year**

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CLAREMORE
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WOODWARD
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the number of medical students who returned to the site of their preceptorship to enter practice.

"It's not unusual for a student to say their preceptorship was one of their best months in medical school," says Brand, who remembers fondly his own 1984 preceptorship in Okeene. "Only a very few claim the experience was not helpful."

While many of the students plan to enter a specialty and actually never will practice in a small town, they will be consulting with primary care physicians in small communities and will be sending patients back to their home community for follow-up care.

"They need to have some idea of what it's like to be the physician on the other end of the phone call," the family medicine professor points out.

"Students come back from their preceptorship with a better sense of family medicine and primary care and a newfound respect for what happens out there," Brand says. "In just one month, they will experience car wrecks, old people with pneumonia, young people with broken bones, cuts to sew up, chest pain to deal with, people to pronounce dead. When patients come in by ambulance, the preceptee and the nurses may be the first ones there, with family standing 10 feet away."

What happens "out there" is not always the same kind of medicine that is practiced at a major medical center, where there are an almost unlimited number of options for the care of that patient, Brand continues.

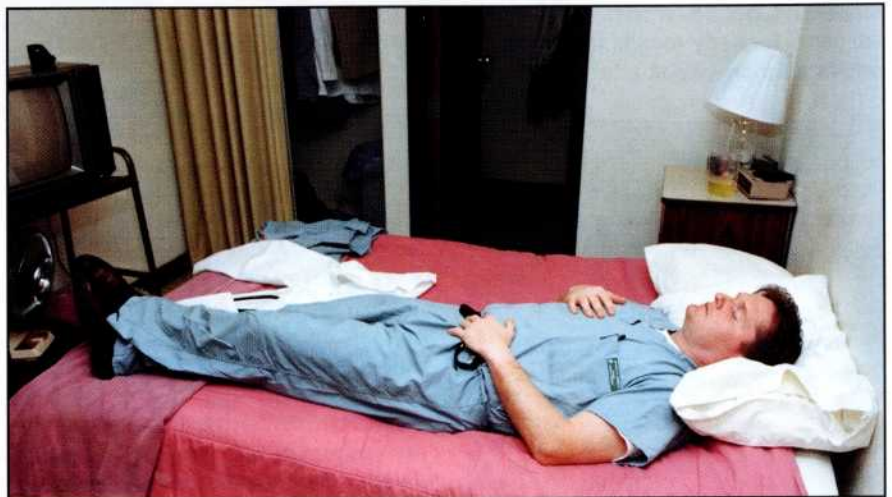
"A major lesson learned by our students is the patient's agenda takes priority. Maybe the patient doesn't want to be sent off for a bypass or an angioplasty. Maybe they say, 'Just give me some medicine, Doc, and when it's my time to go, it's my time.'

"Rural Oklahomans are independent and teach students that the leading edge is not necessarily the best thing for them and their family," he



■ At left: Since Jim Lindsey, left, is the only surgeon in Oklahoma serving as an OU preceptor, he is in great demand to mentor medical students like Jeff Garrett, who have an interest in a surgical residency.

■ Below: Like most OU preceptees, Garrett lives in the hospital during his stay in Pauls Valley, making him first on the scene in cases of emergency.



adds. "They are treating the legacy as well as the patient."

Brand emphasizes that the physicians who volunteer their time and knowledge to the OU preceptorship program are making a valuable contribution to medical education in the state.

"Our preceptors take a great deal of pride participating in student education and maintaining their community's tradition of playing an active role in the OU College of Medicine," Brand says.

No community has carried on that tradition longer than Pauls Valley.

Jim Lindsey's father helped organize the OU preceptorship program and supervised OU medical students from its inception. Jim Lindsey has participated in the program for 36 years and has supervised hundreds of OU medical students. Physicians all over the country think of him whenever they practice a "Lindseyism."

As Brand explains, if you ask graduates of the OU College of Medicine about their preceptorship, be ready to listen to a story or two about their first foray into frontline medicine and the doc who led them through it.