

# Attention Must Be Paid

by Terri Yablonsky Stat

**T**he world of medicine has changed greatly since Howard N. Allen '58, MD '60, first became a physician, but he still holds fast to the time-honored, albeit time-consuming, virtues of personalized attention to patients and careful consideration of each one's condition.

His approach is rooted in compassion gained from personal experience, which has guided his successful career in both academic medicine and private practice.

For Allen, a cardiologist with the Cardiovascular Medical Group of Southern California in Beverly Hills, spending two hours with a new patient is standard procedure. That's how long it takes him to question, examine, review his findings and counsel a patient, as well as to truly get to know a patient. "I ask all the questions as I did when I was a medical student," he says. "I obtain a detailed, face-to-face history."

Allen also has dedicated himself to instilling his thoroughness in future physicians. He's program director for Cardiology Grand Rounds at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles and a clinical professor of medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Allen credits his patient evaluation approach to the late Edmund F. Foley, MD, professor of medicine. "He was a very astute clinician," Allen remembers. "He practiced medicine the way I still try to practice, which is to extract as much information as possible at the bedside and to have a reasonable idea of the patient's condition based on information gained from the clinical examination.

A career in medicine was a natural fit for Allen. He was only eight and a half

years old when his mother died of uterine cancer, and he grew up with an older sister who was afflicted with polio. These early experiences taught him the value of compassion. "I approach each patient as if they were a family member or myself and treat them as such," he says.

A graduate of Farragut High School (now Farragut Career Academy) on Chicago's West Side—where he was a top student-athlete, including being class valedictorian, managing editor of the school newspaper, lettering in basketball and football and being voted "the most outstanding senior"—Allen completed his premed studies at the University of Illinois' Navy Pier campus. He was cited as one of the 43 most outstanding students during the campus' first 10 years at its Tenth Anniversary Convocation in 1956. The proud Chicago native then enrolled at the College of Medicine, where he was elected to Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Society.

Allen has fond memories of these days. A recipient of a National Scientific Foundation grant, he worked one summer in the laboratory of the late famed pharmacologist Harris Busch '45, MD '46, PhD, at the time a professor in the department of pharmacology. The laboratory was involved in studying the metabolism of tumor cells in rodents and the effect of various drugs, part of Busch's lifetime work elucidating the biochemical structure of cancer cells.

"It was a very close-knit group," Allen says. "Every Saturday morning, we'd meet in the lab to present our data. We'd finish by noon, and I would often go to Oak Street Beach afterwards. Dr. Busch used to drop me off there on his way back home to Evanston."

Allen has maintained strong ties with the University of Illinois. In fact, around Cedars-Sinai he's known as "Mr. Illinois," because of his strong support of the university and its athletic teams. He regularly attends Illini games when their teams are competing in Los Angeles, dressed in orange and blue, and has made many trips back to Chicago to visit the College of Medicine. The University of Illinois Alumni Association has honored Allen twice for his dedication to his alma mater, choosing him to receive the UIAA Loyalty Award in 1996 and the Lou Liay Spirit Award in 2005.

"I received seven years of quality education with a very nominal tuition, so I feel obligated to pay back the university as best I can to make it possible for other qualified students to have the same opportunities I had," Allen says of his devotion to the university.

Allen completed his internship at the Los Angeles County General Hospital and his residency in internal medicine at the Los Angeles Veterans Administration Medical Center. During his residency, Allen rotated through the various internal



Howard N. Allen, MD

medicine subspecialties before realizing that he found cardiology most rewarding.

Because of his mother's death from cancer, his original intentions were to specialize in hematology/oncology. However, at the time, "there was only a limited amount you could offer patients with cancer, usually only palliative care," he reflects, "and I thus felt frustrated in caring for such patients. On the other hand, many new advances were being introduced into cardiology that resulted in improved quality of life as well as increased longevity. I felt that cardiology gave me more tools to help patients."

Allen embraced the emerging possibilities of his chosen specialty wholeheartedly, completing cardiology fellowships at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center with H.J.C. Swan, MD, PhD, and at St. George's Hospital in London, England, with Aubrey Leatham, MB. He feels that the patient ap-

proach that he was exposed to during his St. George's Hospital fellowship training left him head and shoulders above most of his peers in his ability to assess a patient at the bedside.

After completing his fellowship training, he joined Cedars-Sinai Medical Center as the director of the Cardiac Care Unit, the first such unit on the West Coast. He also established and served as the director of the Pacemaker Evaluation Center, the first facility of its kind in the greater Los Angeles area, and director of the Cardiac Noninvasive Laboratory, also the first such unit in the greater Los Angeles area.

"What I liked best is that I would see the most complex diagnostic or management problems," he reflects of this time. "I also enjoyed teaching, especially when you have a receptive audience."

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interns, residents and cardiology fellows. In addition to the training of fellows in the Cardiac Noninvasive Laboratory and making patient rounds with interns, residents and cardiology fellows, he also made rounds with fourth-year medical students every Friday morning for 25 years. He would try to impress on both the students and house staff that with a careful history and appropriate physical examination, a doctor could have a pretty good idea of the patient's diagnosis and predict the laboratory findings.

While Allen relished the cutting-edge aspect of academic medicine, eventually he realized that he most enjoyed taking care of patients. In 1988, he transitioned to a half-time position at Cedars-Sinai and half-time in private practice. In 1996, he committed to full-time private practice.

As a cardiologist in Beverly Hills, he's no stranger to high-profile patients. "Most of them are very decent, down-to-earth people," he says. "A few are prima donnas who expect special treatment. Some might be upset if my secretary doesn't return their call as fast as they would like. Once they can appreciate my level of conscientiousness, compassion and competence, they generally calm down."

Undoubtedly, thousands of patients, both famed and anonymous, have been calmed, comforted and healed thanks to Allen's devoted approach to patient care.