

Spurgeon William Clark III, MD: Like father, like son

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Staff News Writer

The AMA “Members Move Medicine” series profiles a wide variety of doctors, offering a glimpse into the passions of women and men navigating new courses in American medicine.

On the move with: Spurgeon William Clark III, MD, who goes by Bill, an ophthalmologist at the Clark Eye Clinic in Waycross, Georgia.

AMA member since: 1981.

What inspired me to pursue a career in medicine: My father was a pioneer ophthalmologist in Southeast Georgia and a very effective legislative advocate. He was my hero. As a young boy, I was impressed with the number of people who would walk up to our family in a local restaurant or store, apologize for the intrusion and introduce their children or grandchildren to “the man who helped me see again.” Making rounds with him at our local hospital probably sealed the deal.

How I move medicine: By advocating for increased medical association membership at the state, specialty and national specialty levels. As 2017–2019 chair of the Southeastern Delegation to the AMA, each of my presentations to all 18 of our units included a rationale and plea for increased membership—especially for rejoiners—and participation at each level of organized medicine.

In addition, I am an active financial contributor to medical political action committees (PACs), active candidates to whom I serve as a medical adviser and strongly believe that all physicians should be active advocates in the political arena on behalf of our patients and our profession.

Career highlights: I have served as:

- President of the Medical Association of Georgia.
- Chair of the American Academy of Ophthalmology’s PAC.
- Chair of the Georgia Delegation and Southeastern Delegation to the AMA.

I am proud to have been awarded the Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) Physicians

Distinguished Service Award, the Georgia Chapter American College of Physicians Leadership Award and the American Academy of Ophthalmology's National Outstanding Advocate's Award.

One of my favorite accomplishments has been the establishment of the Georgia Physicians Leadership Academy, which has now trained over 120 emerging physician leaders who now serve and will continue to serve MAG at every level.

Advice I'd give to those interested in pursuing a career in medicine: The practice of the art of medicine is a calling, not an expectation of your parents. If you choose our path, your road will not be easy but the rewards to a successfully practicing physician are awesome—and I'm talking about personal affirmation from happy patients, not just financial security.

You already know you will have to study long and hard for many years. Develop relationships with others who share your goals and study with them before tests. To succeed, you would be well served to find and develop a relationship with a physician mentor you respect while you are in college (at the latest).

How I give back to the community: I believe physicians are in a wonderful position to be thought and activist leaders in our communities, even if they don't hold public office. I am fortunate now to serve as chair of the Okefenokee Swamp Park Board of Trustees (come see it!), chair of the Waycross-Ware County Industrial Development Authority, chair of the Waycross Convention and Visitors Bureau, and executive-committee member of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce.

But before all that, I was chair of our church's administrative council, the chamber of commerce, my children's parent-teacher association, local school and economic development bond drives, and have been active in school athletic activities, Rotary Club, Leadership Georgia and our local medical society—among others. I encourage you to take part in community activities in addition to organized medicine.

Aspect of my work that means the most: Direct patient care, including eye surgery, is the most meaningful part of my professional life. Trailing only slightly behind have been the opportunities to make a difference through leadership positions at the state and national levels.

My hope for the future of medicine: That physicians, no matter their employment model, will continue to serve our patients as their best advocates for outcomes and to support our profession as leaders/members in organized medicine—advancing policy in democratic physician assemblies and promoting their adoption by state legislatures and the U.S. Congress.

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