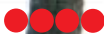


FLORIDA

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LEAVING HIS MARK

For Kevin Sherin, M.D., serving the community goes beyond just medicine

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Kevin M. Sherin, M.D., M.P.H.

With his commitment to public health, Kevin Sherin, M.D., is making Orange County a better place for all.

LEAVING HIS MARK

For Kevin Sherin, M.D., serving the community goes beyond just medicine

By Cheryl Lock

Not every doctor would be able to find time between work and family life to become a mentor to children in the community, but that's just one of the many things Orange County Public Health Director Kevin Sherin, M.D., does that has set the bar so high.

A few years ago Dr. Sherin, along with about 50 of his staff, decided to become mentors at an elementary school that was struggling under the weight of their high number of single-parent families and equally high crime rates.

"Orange County school district is the largest in the United States, so that is a lot to take on," Dr. Sherin said. "At the time, schools were set on a grading system, and this one school in particular had received a failing grade two years in a row. There was a new, dynamic principal at the school, Ruth Baskerville, and she was looking for a little help. She was the most unbelievable leader I can think of as an educator."

So once a week, Dr. Sherin and his staff would go over at lunchtime to spend time with a specific student from the school. They would read or do math homework, or even work on their FCAT test practice.

"I had this little guy, and I saw him go from failing classes to where he could actually read," the doctor said proudly. "One of the greatest moments in my life was when he started to read on his own. The first thing I did was help him read the story of Martin Luther King, Jr., and I thought, 'Wow, this is really something.' He had never even heard the story."

A FOCUS ON THE COMMUNITY

For a man who grew up as an only child in a small town, Dr. Sherin has managed to do a lot of good for a whole lot of people.

"It's not typical that someone from the type of background I have would end up wanting to be a manager or a leader of a group of people," the doctor said. "But I had a great family, and from the time I was in high school I aspired to be a family doctor."

From a small boy in Uxbridge, Massachusetts to undergraduate school in Notre Dame, medical school in Chicago and eventually Director of the Orange County Public Health Department, President Elect of the Orange County Medical Society, and undoubtedly one of the most accessible doctors Orlando has come to know (just ask anyone he's worked

with), Dr. Sherin has had what some might call a meteoric rise.

And he attributes most of it to Jesse Jackson.

"I was just out of residency, working as a family doctor in Chicago, and I listened to a speech by Jesse Jackson at the Democratic National Convention in 1984," Dr. Sherin said. "He said what we need in this country is physicians who are more interested in public health than in personal wealth. And I thought, that's what this is all about."

Jackson's speech stayed in the doctor's mind. He started attending night school and eventually received his masters in public health.

"I started looking around at what you can do with public health as a physician, and I read in a newsletter they were looking for county health physicians in Florida," he said. So he applied and was hired to work in Highland County.

Only nine days into the job, Dr. Sherin's ability to work well under pressure was put to the test.

"I had just started, and a public health emergency broke out in the town of Sebring," he said. "I was in this small town, so I figured nothing was going to happen there, at least nothing like this. I'd have time to learn the ropes and all that. It didn't happen that way."

Instead, Dr. Sherin was faced with a botulism outbreak where he was thrown into working with the CDC and the Food and Drug Administration; he even went in with the sheriff of the town to retrieve evidence from the restaurant where the botulism incident first occurred.

"To make a long story short, I realized that, luckily, I did in fact enjoy working in public health," he said.

In Polk County, Florida, when Dr. Sherin was supervising and working with all public health epidemiology, he encountered another poisoning incident, this time involving an entire family.

"There was even a 'Reader's Digest' story about this case," Dr. Sherin said. "When the cops finally went back to the family's house, after I insisted, they found empty soda bottles

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— Kevin Sherin, M.D., Orange County Public Health Director

under the sink and confirmed the poisoning came from Thallium, a substance that has been banned for years.”

Although Dr. Sherin’s time in the sunshine state was interrupted when he moved back to Chicago for family reasons, the doctor couldn’t stay away for long. When he did finally return to Florida, this time it was as the Public Health Director of Orange County.

And once again Dr. Sherin’s ability to handle pressure was quickly challenged. Within a week of moving his family back to Florida in 2004, the state was hit by three hurricanes, and the doctor was forced to add a new aspect to his resume – disaster medicine.

“I had worked in Hurricane Andrew and saw the public health service roll up their sleeves and get things done, and the same thing happened with these hurricanes,” he said.

As if a new job and three hurricanes weren’t enough, during this time was when Dr. Sherin first noticed a lump on the side of his neck.

“It took me a while to get a biopsy, but the whole time I knew what it was,” he said. “And it did turn out to be lymphoma. So I had to deal with a brand new job, a new community and live through the chemo.”

During the following months, Dr. Sherin says he’s lucky he had his faith, family and a little country music to help him make it through.

“I’m not a country western person, but I found a song that really touched me,” he said. “And my wife and family were so supportive. I came out the other end much stronger than I was going in.”

Although he might have felt stronger, the doctor still had his work cut out for him in his role as public health director.

REACHING OUT

“There’s a part of me that’s altruistic, that just wants to be part of a solution, and one of the systems to do that is with the volunteer system,” Dr. Sherin said.

Working within the community is something that the doctor has always felt helped bring him closer to the people he was working so hard for. On top of mentoring, Dr. Sherin also got involved with Shepherd’s Hope, a series of clinics in school-based settings that provide help to people with no access to healthcare. As a volunteer physician for the program, he moved between the locations that needed him, getting to know the people and the geography of his new home.

But Dr. Sherin’s helping hands extend beyond local elemen-

tary schools and free clinics. He has also worked tirelessly to help victims of domestic violence. And for that he has O.J. Simpson to thank.

“There I was in 1994, watching the same O.J Simpson car chase, just like everyone else, and I thought to myself, ‘I’m a family doctor, and I’ve never seen a tool for domestic violence,’” he said. “I saw this as a big problem.”

Not willing to let it slide, a few years later, using the acronym for alcohol screening commonly used in primary textbooks as inspiration, Dr. Sherin came up with his own acronym for domestic violence — HITS, which stands for Hurt, Insulted, Threatened, Screamed or cursed at. The doctor would later add a second S to stand for Sexually Assaulted.

Together with a few colleagues, Dr. Sherin conducted a research project and tested the acronym in shelters and family practices. The results were published in 1998, and it has been translated into many other languages and used around the world.

“To use it in an every day setting, a doctor would ask, ‘How often does your partner’ and then use HITSS,” said Dr. Sherin, who also works as the vice president of the board of victims service center for the Board of the Sexual Assault Treatment Center in Orlando. “Then the answers are scored to evaluate the level of domestic abuse, if any, that is present.”

LOVING LIFE

Despite the busy schedule that Dr. Sherin keeps, he has managed to always make time for his family. “My family and I watch movies and play in our pool. I’m just like everybody else. I spend time with my family as often as possible.”

The doctor even managed to get back to his roots recently when he took his family horseback riding. As a child he would go horseback riding with his father, and he made it a point to take his family for the same type of experience.

The doctor has a 16-year-old son, and his youngest daughter, Jennifer, was adopted from China. She is now nine and finishing third grade. “She wants to be a vet, so our house is filled with pets,” said the proud dad. “We have guinea pigs, goldfish, dogs, a rabbit. This house looks more like a zoo than a house.”

His oldest daughter, Grace, is in college and works at Universal Studios.

“So I have one in high school, one in college and one in elementary school,” he said. “It’s busy, but that’s the way I like it. **FD**