

April 08, 2013

FAFP Member Spotlight: Alma Littles, MD, FAAFP

Member Spotlight: Alma Littles, MD

By Joy Batteh-Freiha



At a young age, Tallahassee family physician Alma Littles, knew what she wanted to be when she grew up, with the help of a mentor.

“When my second grade teacher said I should be a doctor, I really didn’t understand the significance of that statement at the time,” said Littles, Senior Associate Dean for Medical Education and Academic Affairs at Florida State University College of Medicine. “Looking back, I realize her saying that provided me with a goal to work towards which would not have been on my radar otherwise.”

And from early on in her career in active private practice, performing well-baby exams to examining elderly patients and advising caregivers, Littles says she really hasn’t stopped setting goals and she helps others set them, too.

“I always tell students to set a goal, recognizing that it may change as they go through school and life,” said Littles. “They should find a way to balance working on their goal with enjoying life – and listen to the advice of others who are successful. Don’t let failures deter you from your goal.”

As a College of Medicine faculty leader, Littles has a front row seat to the future of medicine.

If a medical student had the opportunity to shadow her for the day, Littles said they would have an exciting day as

she goes from a meeting with faculty members to discuss a new element in the delivery of the microbiology or pathology course, to evaluating medical students, working on new policies, and even participating in legislative visits at the Capitol on behalf of medical education and family medicine – something she feels very strongly and is vocal about.

“It’s not enough for members [of the Florida Academy of Family Physicians] to just attend our specialty meetings,” said Littles. “At a recent legislative session with residents and medical students, one message we emphasized was, ‘If you’re not at the table, you may end up on the menu.’”

“It was a great opportunity for students to see firsthand how individuals who have no medical background make decisions about how patient care is delivered,” continued Littles. “That alone should motivate them to become involved.”

The doctor practices what she preaches. Active in both the Florida Academy of Family Physicians as well as the American Academy of Family Physicians since her days as a resident in the late 1980s, Littles said being involved in organized medicine has helped her career immensely.

“Just having the access to outstanding mentors is probably one of the greatest things the FAFP provided me early in my career,” said Littles. “The executive vice presidents, especially Martha Moores, presidents and other leaders in the Academy really took the time to encourage and guide my leadership development which has proven to be extremely valuable in all the other areas of my career.”

“Serving on various committees and holding various positions within the FAFP helped prepare me to serve on some of the same committees of the AAFP. My work with the FAFP has even helped me in my current position with the College of Medicine.”

With a “half-full” outlook, Littles believes that even though there are many unknowns with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, in the long run it may be beneficial for some, as it will create a path for people living in rural areas – who may not have health insurance – to gain access via Medicaid or some other method.

“The ACA [Affordable Care Act] may indeed create more opportunity for family physicians, as well,” said Littles. “As more patients receive insurance, we will need to have a way to increase their access to physicians, especially primary care physicians. Providing more residency training positions for family physicians is one way to achieve this goal.”

And the best part of being a family physician for Littles?

“The relationships! In my practice, I was able to form relationships with my patients, recognizing that they were entrusting me with their health and their very lives,” said Littles. “The diversity of family medicine – the fact that you never know what would be waiting for you in the next room, or having the opportunity to talk to patients, help them work through health care concerns and even catching up on how things are going with their children, grandparents, church and school, is the best part of being a family physician.”