



Mecklenburg County Medical Society – A History Lesson, Part 1

By Janice E. Huff, MD, President

Parts are excerpted from speeches by David Stratton, MD, Lawrence K. Boggs, MD, and John Foust, MD, as well as taken from various History of Mecklenburg County Medicine documents, which can be reviewed at the Medical Society office.

Since this is our 110th anniversary, I thought it would be a good time to review some history and tidbits from the past. Some things never change, while others do. There are some things MCMS should continue to do and others we will need to change as we go forward into our next 110 years.

The earliest recorded statement concerning the formation of a medical society in Mecklenburg County appeared in the Charlotte Observer on October 7, 1903. It read as follows:

An organization of the Mecklenburg County Medical Society will be effected today in Court House at 11:30 o'clock. There are sixty doctors in Mecklenburg County, and it is probable that a majority of these will attend the meeting at the Court House. It is expected that every doctor in the county will be a member of the organization.

The first president was H. Q. Alexander, MD. Annie Alexander, MD, one of the first women to practice medicine in the South was the vice-president and became president in 1909. The next female president was Jonnie McLeod, MD, in 1989! In 1903, office calls and home visits were \$1.50, and delivery of a baby was \$7.

J. P. Matheson, MD, a charter member, was the founder of the Charlotte EENT Hospital. Through his will, he endowed a lecture series for the continuing education of Charlotte's physicians, with the first Matheson Lecture held in 1944. While there is no longer a lecture series, funds through this endowment are used for our annual membership meetings.

William Allen, MD, also a charter member, was the founder of the Medical Library. The Medical Society assumed responsibility for the library in 1949. The library collection was donated to Charlotte AHEC in 1977. At that time, it was the largest medical library in any city in the U.S. that did not have a medical school.

In 1963, every physician joined

the Medical Society because hospital privileges were only given after the physician was accepted as a member ... and that required meeting with the three past presidents. Maybe it would be faster to credential this way now! When you were accepted, you were given a number so physicians could be paged in public without revealing their names (because some competitive doctors would page themselves by name at the coliseum and other public events). John Foust, MD, was number 248. Does anyone else remember his or her number? The MCMS Cabinet approved the 1,000th member in 1991.

The Dr. Elias S. Faison Trust was established in 1956 by Sara Davies and Pleasants Coggleshaw. This trust still provides funding for medical education for MCMS members. The Smith Arthritis Fund was established in 1979 by Carolyn Kirkpatrick Smith for arthritis research. The fund supports research projects as they relate to the needs of patients suffering from rheumatologic diseases. Grants continue to be awarded each year.

The Mecklenburg Medical Alliance started in 1934 and was expanded to include the Endowment in 1982. The name was changed to the Mecklenburg Medical Alliance and Endowment (MMAE). MMAE has contributed more than \$1.2 million since then to improve the health of community residents. The Auxiliary opened MMAE's Inn (pronounced May) on Scott Avenue in 1985. A second inn was opened in 1992 at St. John's Baptist Church. In 1998, the name officially was changed to Hospitality House of Charlotte, and in 2008 both houses were consolidated into a newly built house on Scott Avenue.

Meck PAC, a political action committee involved with local and state campaigns, was started in 1983. Over the years, your contributions to Meck PAC (and the participation of our Legislative Committee and the Charlotte Area Medical Group Managers) have helped pass many

legislative actions that benefit patients and physicians. Most recently, these actions include medical liability reform, the Medicaid budget and payment issues, mental health policy and funding, workman's compensation reform, keeping Community Care of North Carolina (CCNC) as our primary Medicaid program and working on various scope-of-practice issues.

MCMS began staffing the Mecklenburg Chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians in 1985 and now also provides staffing for the Charlotte Pediatric Society, Charlotte Medical Dental and Pharmaceutical Society, Charlotte Dental Society, Charlotte Area Medical Group Managers, and most recently, the North Carolina Society of Gastroenterology.

The Shelter Medical Clinic for the homeless was opened in 1987 at The Men's Shelter on North Tryon Street. The Medical Clinic ceased operations after 17 years of providing free medical care to the local indigent population. However, the Shelter still provides access to an on-site nurse's clinic, dental clinic, and other volunteer healthcare services.

The first Community Intern Program was held in 1990, and it continues today. This is an excellent venue to show "non-medical" leaders in Charlotte what the everyday life of a physician is like. The program has "graduated" 178 interns, and 252 physicians have volunteered. I would encourage all of you to participate in this worthwhile educational program in 2013. We welcome anyone interested, but we especially need primary care physicians.

The Teen Health Connection, a private free-standing health clinic for teenagers, was opened in 1992 through the efforts of the MCMS and MMAE.

MedAssist was started in 1997 through the Auxiliary as a free pharmacy to provide prescription medications for low-income seniors. NC MedAssist became a free-standing nonprofit that provides free prescription medications to eligible low-

income and uninsured adults and children in Mecklenburg County and throughout North Carolina. NC MedAssist now is the largest charitable pharmacy in the state, serving 3,000 patients monthly.

Physicians Reach Out (PRO) started in 2004 due to the vision and guidance of then-president John Klimas, MD, whose never-ending energy allowed for its' growth. PRO provides primary and specialty medical and dental care to eligible uninsured residents in Mecklenburg County. This program works due to the volunteer work of 1,600 physicians, physician assistants, dentists and other healthcare partners, along with the donation of services at reduced rates by both hospital organizations, and medications provided by NC MedAssist. The program has helped 9,900 patients and provided \$79M worth of care since inception. The program now is administered by Care Ring but needs the continued support of all physicians, physician assistants and dentists to continue helping people who "fall through the safety net of medical and dental care" in Mecklenburg County.

The Bulletin (now Mecklenburg Medicine magazine) was started in 1970, and a website was created in 1988. The website recently was updated, and I would encourage everyone to check it out at www.meckmed.org. We welcome any suggestions for both.

Under the leadership of George Barrett, MD (a past president), and other like-minded individuals, the Bioethics Committee was organized in 1984, and incorporated as the Bioethics Resource Group (BRG) in 1985. The Medical Society, under the leadership of Dr. Barrett and Dr. K. D. Weeks, led a fundraising drive to endow the MCMS Distinguished Professorship in Health Care Ethics at UNCC, and in 1999, Rosemary Tong, PhD, became the first person to hold the professorship. The BRG ceased to exist in 2008, but the Medical Society continues to partner with Dr. Tong to produce the "Medicine and Society" television programs based on challenging medical ethics issues of concern to our community. The most recent program was "Working Together to Control the Obesity Epidemic:

Facts, Fiction and Workable Solutions" with MCMS members Thomas Marlowe, MD, Shivani Mehta, MD, and David Voellinger, MD.

This is only a partial list of the contributions that Mecklenburg County Medical Society members have made through the years. In future issues, I will tell you about some of our other noteworthy accomplishments, as well as past history. Working together, we can continue to improve the health and well-being of all citizens of Mecklenburg County. Any new idea is welcome here. The Medical Society committees and staff are here to help bring your ideas for a healthier community to fruition. If everyone contributes a little time, money or effort, I am confident we, along with our many partners, can achieve great things and make the Mecklenburg County Medical Society a model for others to emulate!

Janice

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