



DEVOTED TO FAMILY MEDICINE

BY MARTY METZGER

When James Danforth graduated from medical school in 1974, he entered a paper world of chart notes and journals. When Dr. Danforth retired from active practice in September 2011, he exited a desktop, laptop and handheld world of linked computers. What a difference 37 years has made!

After meriting his medical degree at Wayne State University in Detroit, Dr. Danforth had a three-year family practice residency at Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound in Seattle, then relocated to Colorado when med school friend Muni Barash, M.D., contacted him. Dr. Barash, who was working at the new McKee Medical Center in Loveland, was returning to Denver and urged his friend to replace him at McKee. Dr. Danforth had also received a letter from Dr. Dennis Elo, asking new doctors to come to Loveland. A love for the mountains clinched Dr. Danforth's decision, and he made the move in 1977. He spent one year working in McKee's emergency room. He then worked with Drs. Keith Sutton and Boake Baird at Loveland Medical Clinic from 1978 to 1980.

In 1980, Dr. Danforth and Dr. Nancy Ashbach co-founded Columbine Family Practice Center in

Loveland, which has now grown to six providers who attend to the healthcare needs of approximately 15,000 patients. For 15 of the practice's 31 years, he delivered babies and those babies are now second generation patients.

Most career paths widen with time, but Dr. Danforth's occupational trail fanned out into a virtual superhighway. He's spent 31 years at Columbine Family Practice. He became the original director of Hospice of Larimer County, the county's first hospice, in 1980. Now called Pathways Hospice, it has expanded to 150 patients at any given time, according to Dr. Danforth. He's gratified that Pathways has added a five-bed, inpatient facility at McKee, the only such accommodation in Larimer or Weld counties. Dr. Danforth's long association with McKee included a 1983-1984 term as the hospital's Chief of Staff and, for a number of years, he was a member of its Ethics Committee. He also was president of the Larimer County Medical Society in 1990.

The doctor volunteers with the National Sports Center for the Disabled at Winter Park where, coupling skiing talent to his pediatrics background, he's taught the snowy skill to kids from Children's Hospital for six years. And, civic-minded Dr. Danforth served as the original chairman of the Loveland Open Lands Advisory Commission from 1996 until 2002.

Dr. Danforth and wife, Linda, have been

married for 34 years and have two sons. Brian, 31, is a chemical engineer in Portland, Ore., and Kyle, 28, serves as an academic adviser at the University of Colorado in Denver.

At 64, Dr. Danforth retires from a medical practice but not from the profession. He remains co-director at Pathways Hospice. In May 2010, he journeyed to Quito, Ecuador for a medical mission with the University of Colorado. Dr. Danforth hopes to volunteer medically in other parts of the world as well. He will continue at Winter Park teaching children the freedom of conquering the slopes. And, he intends to volunteer at area schools as a mentor to students struggling with a subject.

More plans include participation in church activities with Namaqua Forum, sponsored by Namaqua Unitarian Universalist Church. He and Linda like to travel and enjoy cycling, particularly Rails to Trails (a nationwide program that converts obsolete railroad tracks to a re-surfaced network of crushed rock paths for fat tire bikes).

Community growth and evolution of medical mindsets and technologies loom large in Dr. Danforth's rearview mirror. When he arrived in Loveland, the small community of 24,000 souls had offered wonderful opportunities to incoming physicians at then 1-year-old McKee. After all, a mere 15 M.D.s practiced in the small community. The shared support and camaraderie of doctors at McKee largely influenced his decision to remain in Loveland, says Dr. Danforth.

"Big transitions have occurred," he reports about his career in medicine.

He recalls originally handwriting chart notes and researching strictly in textbooks and journals. Now, physicians enter and access "chart" notes online, where most research also occurs. Organizations representing multiple specialties care for populations of patients, as per the Mayo Clinic model, healthcare is moving from a volume- to value-based system and diagnostic procedures have multiplied exponentially.

He says that working in a family practice rather than a specialty field allowed him a closer bond with patients. "It's an asset for both patient and physician to have that connection," Dr. Danforth remarks. "We see problems from their onset and, due to the ongoing relationship with the patient, can better work as a team to resolve them."

Born and raised in the Detroit area, he took to Colorado like the proverbial water-loving duck. "It's been a great pleasure to practice medicine in Loveland for 34 years," Dr. Danforth happily declares.

The experienced doctor offers old-time wisdom: "If I can provide one piece of advice to new family physicians, it's to remember that people function as members of families. In this computerized age, it's important to learn about the whole person. That's one of the most rewarding parts of family practice."

Families to whom Dr. Danforth has devoted so many caring years most likely feel that they, too, have been greatly rewarded. ✚

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