

Dr. Diana Kerwin

By Mary Jacobs



As a child, Diana Kerwin spent many of her Christmas mornings at a nursing home. That may have launched her on the path she's still following today.

Her mother was a geriatric nurse in a long term care facility and often worked holiday shifts, bringing her four children along. "Today, Dr. Diana Kerwin spends her days working almost exclusively with seniors as chief of geriatrics at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital Dallas and director of Texas Alzheimer's and Memory Disorders, a Texas Health Physicians Group practice in Dallas."

"Growing up, I admired my mom, and I think I have an enhanced respect for people who are older as a result," Dr. Kerwin said.

But Karen Taylor, whose 81-year-old mother is a patient of Dr. Kerwin, sees more than just "respect" in Dr. Kerwin's work with patients.

"It's pretty clear to me that she has found what her passion is, and she's excelling in it," she said.

Following her path

That may explain why, at a time when few physicians are choosing to specialize in geriatrics, Dr. Kerwin is not only embracing the field but aiming high.

At Texas Health Resources, she's working to expand her practice, add a research program, and ultimately to create a nationally-recognized center in Dallas for people living with Alzheimer's and other forms of memory loss.

On top of that, she's a member of the National Board of the Alzheimer's Association and Chairman of the Dallas Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. She serves as associate medical director at the memory care unit of Presbyterian Village North, an educator in the Alzheimer's Association's educational program, MindShare, and an associate of UT Southwestern's clinical teaching faculty.

Dr. Kerwin says she manages to juggle all those commitments because "it's all related to Alzheimer's and the patients," she said. "Because it's all related, it's all interesting to me.

Leihla Moore, Dr. Kerwin's Practice Manager, puts it this way: "She has a passion for this disease and the people who are affected by it."

By 2030, one out of every five Americans—or about 70 million total—will be older than age 65, according to the American Geriatrics Society. Yet today, there are only 7,000

certified geriatricians in the U.S., or one for every 2,600 Americans age 75 and older, and their ranks aren't growing, the society says.

One theory as to why: treating Medicare patients isn't as lucrative as many other specialties, and physicians shy away from practicing a branch of medicine that, in many cases, means offering comfort, rather than a cure. In the case of Alzheimer's patients, there is no cure or effective treatment.

But Dr. Kerwin bristles just a bit at the suggestion that her work might be discouraging or depressing.

"There is always something we can do to improve the situation of a patient, if we just pay attention," she said. With a correct diagnosis and a good understanding of the disease progression, for example, a family can better understand how to give the patient as much independence as possible, while keeping him or her safe.

Taylor said that Dr. Kerwin took the time to review all of her mother's medications and other medical issues. "She's very thorough," she said. "Our previous practitioners didn't always take those into consideration." And while other doctors tended to direct the conversation to Taylor, rather than her mom, she noticed the way Dr. Kerwin makes a point to address the patient. If the person is in a

wheelchair, Dr. Kerwin kneels so as to connect at eye level.

"I can see my mother's eyes light up," Taylor said. "She's not feeling as if she's waiting for someone to acknowledge her."
"Dr. Kerwin understands that, just because the patient has dementia doesn't mean she can't see, hear, or feel," said Moore. "They're still people. They still have a voice and they still need to be heard."

Moore says she would've liked to have been able to bring her mother, who passed away with Alzheimer's three years ago, to see Dr. Kerwin. But the doctor is new to the Dallas area -- she opened her practice in 2013 after moving here from the Chicago area.

I wish my mother had had the resources, the information, and the awareness that Dr. Kerwin is bringing to the forefront," she said.

What's next?

While she enjoys working with patients, Dr. Kerwin says she has always divided her time equally between patient care, teaching and research. In the past, her research garnered a Young Investigator Award from the Alzheimer's Association and, in 2006, a T. Franklin Williams Research Scholar award for her research investigating the effects of body weight and vascular risk factors on the development of

cognitive decline and dementia.

Part of her interest in research is a sense of urgency. Currently, the cost of caring for the 5.3 Americans with Alzheimer's will run an estimated \$226 billion in 2015, but the Alzheimer's Association projects that cost could skyrocket to a crippling \$1.1 trillion in 2050.

After decades of research that produced advances in heart and cancer research, Dr. Kerwin says, people are living longer -- but that leads to more Alzheimer's. Her work with the Alzheimer's Association is focused on bringing a much bigger infusion of dollars to Alzheimer's research nationwide. And she's also working to add a research protocol to her practice in Dallas.

While participation in clinical trials will be voluntary, Dr. Kerwin believes the research component will give her patients an element of hope.

"I think it will reassure patients and their families, to know that they are coming to a place that's on the leading edge and contributing to our understanding of this disease," she said.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, call 214-345-4449 or visit TexasAlzheimersAndMemoryDisorders.com.



RETHINK retirement.

AT PRESBYTERIAN VILLAGE NORTH, we're creating new ways to help you make each day better than the one that came before it. A new Lifestyle Fitness Center with a spa, café and wellness programs. New villas for independent living. New residences offering health services, too. **Construction has begun, but you can still save thousands when you reserve today.** Just don't wait too long. You wouldn't want to miss out on a future this bright.

CALL 866.649.6155 OR VISIT VILLAGENORTHUPDATES.ORG.



PRESBYTERIAN
VILLAGE NORTH



WELCOME TO THE TEAM — DR. KERWIN, MEDICAL DIRECTOR — MEMORY CARE