



In this issue:

36th Annual Medical Student Dinner

- Photos from the event

Community

- Gifts to the Giver



Ford Albritton IV, MD

An illness when he was a college freshman changed the course of Ford Albritton's life. He went from a prelaw student at the University of Oklahoma to a premed student at Texas A&M University.

Having grown up with a father and grandfather who were A&M alumni, Ford wanted to try something different. So he had enrolled at Oklahoma, and planned a career as an attorney in music production or oil and gas exploration.

Then his appendix ruptured.

DCMS Physician Spotlight

Ford Albritton IV — Aggie, MD

by Tracy Casto, director of public affairs and advocacy

"I got massively ill," he recalls. "After I had surgery and came home, I wasn't getting any better. I went to the doctors here and they found I was septic because of an abscess."

This turn of events turned his interest to medicine.

"I got a glimpse of medicine," he says. "My dad had wanted to be a pediatrician, and I had thought about that, too. I thought about what I would do if I had it to do over again. Then I had an epiphany — I *do* have it to do all over again. I instantly switched gears and decided to go into medicine."

He worked on ophthalmological and orthopaedic research in medical school, but discovered he enjoyed endoscopic sinus surgery more — it had new procedures and equipment, and fed his desire to explore new areas. After graduating with honors from A&M, he completed his residency and internship at Emory University, where great mentors emboldened and encouraged him. And where he unintentionally influenced a group of surgeons to wear cowboy boots in the OR.

"I started wearing boots at Emory because I was missing Texas," he says. His colleagues couldn't believe the boots were comfortable. "I told them that the boot holds the foot at an angle and in a restful position, good in hours-long surgeries. Suddenly, a mass of surgeons was wearing boots."

Dr. Albritton is chairs the Department of Otolaryngology - Head & Neck Surgery at Texas Health Presbyterian Hospital of Dallas. He also serves as board chairman of the Texas Institute for Surgery. His practice at Presbyterian is a homecoming of sorts when he was growing up in Dallas, he received all his health care at that hospital.

His areas of expertise include sinus and rhinology, minimally invasive surgery, balloon sinuplasty, and thyroid surgery. With some 38 million people affected by sinusitis in the United States, he has a busy practice. He's performed thousands of balloon sinuplasties, and he teaches the procedure to other physicians. He's studying the feasibility of doing balloon intervention in the office, under local anesthesia.

"It would increase access to patients with sinus disease but who are deathly afraid of anesthesia," he explains.

Until the new era of sinus treatments began in 1996, he says that people undergoing sinus surgery lost a lot of blood and were hospitalized for days. In the mid-1980s, an Austrian physician took an orthopaedic telescope and put it in someone's nose — he was called a "nasal astronomer." He could see openings in sinuses and do limited and effective surgeries on the sinuses through the telescope. It was much safer than traditional surgery.

"The newest techniques are minimally invasive," Dr. Albritton says. "They preserve the most tissue. We see improvements in symptom scores of about 52 percent — that's significant. With newer techniques, we may get better improvement. One study showed a 72 percent improvement in symptomatic score."

Dr. Albritton supports a tiered approach regarding the invasiveness of a procedure vs. the severity of the disease when treating a patient.

"I'm passionate about it," he says about balloon sinuplasty. "There's a big misconception regarding sinus surgeons, that we operate on anything and everything. But sinus disease is a combination of factors, from inflammation to anatomical. If the disease is not severe, can we get away with a remodel, rather than a resection, of tissue?"

He's working on studies that would demonstrate this possibility. He wants to develop an algorithm that categorizes sinus diseases into 50 or 60 subtypes and includes which medical regimen works best for each subtype.

Dr. Albritton has several patents at various stages in the years-long approval process. The first is a hearing supplement to help fill a gap in therapy. He says science suggests that antioxidant therapy can delay hearing loss.

"The hypothesis is that a carefully controlled and designed nutritional supplement wouldn't hurt and may help," he says. "Patients kept asking for something to assuage the fullness, dizziness or ringing in their ears, and there was nothing."

Dr. Albritton also is working on a nasal medication that relates to sugars and their role in reducing paralysis of cilia in nasal passages. This line of treatment has been successful in improving lung function in patients with cystic fibrosis, and because the nasal passages are lined with the same type of tissue, he posits that the same medication may work in the nose.

Dr. Albritton can empathize with his patients because

he deals with allergic rhinitis and has had surgery on his septum to improve his breathing. Ten years ago when he was undergoing surgery for his snoring, the surgeon discovered a cyst in the back of his pharynx. It was cancerous.

"It gives me a perspective if I have to tell a patient he has cancer," he says. "I understand what he's going through."

Project Access Dallas Volunteer

Dr. Albritton is a great champion for Project Access Dallas, and has been since its inception in 2002. When he is asked to provide additional help, he's quick to offer to see more patients. He has pledged to see 15 patients a year and consistently meets or exceeds that pledge.

He says his Christian faith propels him to volunteer with PAD.

"We have a big problem in health care, and if all of us come together, we can knock a big chunk of it out," he says. "I was given a certain ability, and I need to use it for a bigger purpose than I can comprehend. Our duty is to help people. Selfishly, I get a lot of satisfaction from the work, and from when patients say, 'Thank you' and write me letters. For most patients, I can do something to help them. I've done sinus surgery on a patient and he gets better. I'm not going to see a dime for it, but it's what we should do.

"I'm using the gifts that God gave me — to take care of others. It's stewardship."

Biker, Artist, Vinyl Recycler

His professional life centers on sinuses, while his nonwork time is split among bicycles, art and music, plus appreciation of wine and travel.

"The gadget guy in me loves the technical aspects of riding," he says. He completed the Hotter 'n' Hell 100 bike ride in Wichita Falls in late August, when the finish-line temperature was 107 degrees. He rode his weekly total (about 100 miles) in one outing and completed the ride in 8½ hours. He and a few of his biker friends hope to start a racing team for a new charity — Team TKO (Take Cancer Out) — to raise money to provide childcare subsidies while the children's mothers undergo cancer treatment.

Dr. Albritton's mother was an art history major, and her side of the family includes many artists. He paints abstract expressionism in oil, water color, and mixed media.

"Originally I painted because I had to put art on my walls," he says.

He travels to New York often and enjoys the creativity of the city's bohemian music scene. He jokes that he's into "vinyl recycling." Although his mother had saved many of the LPs he had when he was younger, the albums all warped. Now he offers to "take your old vinyl LPs and see that they're disposed of in an environmentally friendly way."

Third-generation Aggie

The Albritton name is well-known among Aggies. Dr. Albritton's grandfather, Ford D. Albritton Jr., funded and oversaw construction of what became the Albritton Bell Tower in College Station. The 138-foot tower has become an integral part of Aggie tradition and the major entryway into the academic core of campus.

The tower contains Westminster chimes and 49 carillon bells. The bells weigh 17 tons — the largest weighs more than 6,000 pounds, and the smallest weighs 28 pounds.

On the clock face, in place of the Roman numeral IV, the Albritton tower has "IIII." Discussion on Aggie blogs

has it that Mr. Albritton thought the "IV" too closely resembled "tu" (as Aggies refer to the University of Texas). This is news to Dr. Albritton who immediately calls his grandfather about it.



Dr. Albritton at play and work.

Mr. Albritton explains simply that "IIII" was the European way to write the Roman numeral for 4, and that the clock face and carillon were made in a 300-year-old foundry in France. "Texas is a great school," he says. "I root for UT at all games, except when they play A&M."

Before he began the family's Aggie allegiance, Dr. Albritton's grandfather had been set to go to the University of Texas and even had a dorm room. Then he joined some buddies on a weekend trip to A&M.

"He loved it," Dr. Albritton says. "He switched to A&M, and he passed that passion on to his children."

Dr. Albritton's children (Anna Kate, 6; and Drew, 10) may be the fourth generation of Albrittons at A&M. But, he hasn't indoctrinated his children into being Aggies. "They self-indoctrinated," he says. DMJ



Physician Owned—Physician Directed
Joint Commission Accredited
Practice Opportunities Available



Eleven Dallas Metroplex Locations
Urgent Care, Family Medicine, Occupational Medicine

Call Today 214-572-1124
Email: physicians@primacare.com
Fax: 214-572-7724
www.primacare.com

