



# DESTINED for MEDICINE

Baylor Scott & White  
HEALTH TEXAS PROMOTIONS

Mark Casanova, MD, MPH  
Supportive & Palliative Care

by Pamela Lowery

Born and raised in a close-knit suburban family in San Antonio, Mark Andrew Casanova, MD, was the quintessential child of the 80s. He and his two siblings were each adopted at birth by their loving parents, Rodolfo and Delmira Casanova. "My childhood was normal, but it was a significant experience, which would later come full circle as I got older."

"I was a reserved and shy kid," he says. Rather than participating in athletics like his older brother, Dr. Casanova spent most of his adolescence studying math and science and participating in local science fairs. At an early age Dr. Casanova knew he wanted to be a physician. "I believe I was five years old when I first realized I wanted to be a doctor. As a gift on my 5th birthday, I was given a Fisher Price medical set, and I literally gave my entire family all medical exams," nostalgically recalls the 137th DCMS president.

## BY DIVINE DESIGN

With dedicated aspirations of becoming a pediatrician, in 1987, he applied to one of the first magnet schools in south Texas, Northside Health Careers High School. Without a doubt, Dr. Casanova was accepted into the Bexar County school. He was an exemplary student and, as a result, was awarded various scholarships to colleges and universities throughout the state of Texas. "It all came down to mathematics when it came to selecting the school that I would attend," says Dr. Casanova. "My brother preceded me in college, and money was somewhat tight. Of all the colleges that offered scholarships, and after a tour of the campus with my mother, I felt Texas A&M's scholarship offer was the best." It was during his initial tour of Texas A&M University that he would also become introduced to and become a member of the Texas A&M's acclaimed Corps of Cadets. His service with the Corps would undoubtedly change Dr. Casanova's life forever. The Corps transformed a shy kid from San Antonio into a future leader in Dallas medicine. "I credit the Cadet Corps for instilling in me the value of leadership and the desire to serve. The Corps was tough. Many didn't make it through. I did; it was a very rewarding experience."

But this was not his first moment that he felt the urge to serve and lead. He briefly entertained the idea of the priesthood as a young boy, after an encounter with his maternal grandfather. "He was on his way to the doctor. And as my grandfather was walking to the car, he turned to me and said, 'Chicken, I don't think that I will be coming back.' I remember praying, and telling God that if he would save my grandfather, that I would become a priest." Unfortunately, days after, his grandfather would succumb to his illness.

While completing his residency training at Baylor Dallas in the early 2000s, he began to have prolonged visits with a 10-year-old patient during surgical rotation in the Shriners burns hospital. The young patient had received a kidney transplant from his father; however, the transplant was failing. Although it was a time when the patient should have been lamenting over his own impending demise, he was more concerned about the prolonged health effects for his father. This astounding depth

of selflessness that the child had displayed sparked an interest within Dr. Casanova. This single patient encounter heightened his awareness of the challenges of making a diagnosis and the general investigation process. He went on to graduate from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston in 2000, and subsequently began to focus on general internal medicine, with an emphasis on clinical ethics and palliative care.

## SERVICE IN ORGANIZED MEDICINE

As a young physician, Dr. Casanova's mentor and friend, Robert "Bob" Fine, MD, had mentioned on more than one occasion the names of former DCMS Executive Vice President Michael J. Darrouzet (now EVP/CEO of Texas Medical Association) and DCMS Chief Operating Officer Connie Webster, emphasizing the outstanding assistance that Dallas County Medical Society provided to Dallas member physicians. He eventually invited Dr. Casanova to a disaster preparedness and exposure meeting facilitated by DCMS. Dr. Casanova obliged, and has actively stayed involved with organized medicine.

In 2016, Dr. Casanova was elected to the DCMS board of directors, investing his expertise in the process not only locally but statewide. "DCMS will be in great shape with Dr. Mark Casanova taking the reins next January. He is jovial, warm and approachable and has already demonstrated his leadership and management skills leading our delegation. I look forward to working with Mark in the New Year," states Kevin Klein, MD.

"The DCMS staff makes involvement in organized medicine effortless. Its support and structure makes it rewarding to see the outcome of your investment. My experience in organized medicine generally has been uplifting, helps me rejuvenate, and keeps my life in perspective," says Dr. Casanova.

## 2020 IN PERSPECTIVE

With more than 20 years of experience in practicing medicine, Dr. Casanova has a keen understanding of the diverse possibilities in organized medicine. "I feel that all physicians should participate in organized medicine whether they are practicing day to day or an academic physician. There are many ways to support each other." This is an

exciting time within DCMS. Dr. Casanova foresees that DCMS will not become stagnant, and will not skip a beat. With the transition of the new DCMS executive staff administration, he anticipates that the "changing of the guard" will be seamless, all while pushing the envelope with servitude. "Our retention rate is better than our sister societies across the state which shows in many ways that, we're better off. My predecessor, Dr. Klein, has made a lot of inroads and began to establish solid relationships with Parkland, UT Southwestern and the Dallas County Health Department.

"I want to push forth the vision of hitting 8,000 physicians, not by taking the usual approach of saying we need more, but what does that actually mean...and more importantly what does it mean for our physician members to be a member?" Dr. Casanova says. "Taking a serious deep look at what it takes to be a member, and for our physician colleagues who are not, why are they not members — for us to try to close that gap. I feel if we do that in a more educated fashion, we really do stand a chance of pushing our numbers from the 7,500 range to 8,000. However, we need to do that with an informed approach."

Although he did not become a priest, his path in medicine would inevitably align him with his passion to serve, and the underpinning vow that he once made to God as a young boy. Dr. Casanova touches lives daily, supporting patients as the Director of the palliative care team, and ethics consultant with Baylor University Medical Center Dallas.

Dr. Casanova's life has come full circle in many ways. He is happily married to Claudia Shook Casanova, and they are the proud parents of their adopted daughter Taylor. **DMJ**



**Pamela Lowery** is the Director of Marketing and Communications at DCMS and the editor of the *Dallas Medical Journal*.