



## Kevin W. Klein, MD

136<sup>th</sup> president of Dallas County Medical Society

When Kevin Klein gives talks to students at UT Southwestern, he shows a photo of a nurse administering anesthesia to a patient, while an anesthesiologist stands behind her and three practitioners stand beside the patient. The room has no IVs or monitors — just a group of tanks connected to a rubber bag and mask she holds to deliver anesthesia. He shows this photo to demonstrate how anesthesia has changed and how it remains the same since that scene was captured in the 1920s at Baylor hospital.

“By the way,” he tells the students, “that nurse is my grandmother.”

Dr. Klein’s physician lineage goes back generations, starting 100 years ago in Dallas. His grandfather Horace Duncan graduated from Baylor College of Medicine in 1929 and later was the Dallas County public health officer, with an office in downtown Dallas at Old Red Courthouse. His grandmother was Bess Huskerson Duncan, the second graduate of the Baylor School of Nurse Anesthetists in 1923.

Dr. Klein’s mother was the youngest of three daughters, and continued in the medical field. While at nursing school at UTMB Galveston, she met her husband, Garner Klein, a medical student.



Nurse anesthetist Bess Huskerson Duncan uses a Sanders inhalation mask on a patient during surgery in the late 1920s.

Photo: Baylor University Medical Center

Their son Kevin was born in Galveston, the oldest of three children.

The family moved to Oak Cliff when Garner Klein did his internal medicine residency at the Dallas VA. “He was my role model and best friend,” Dr. Klein says. “Dad was the chief resident in internal medicine, and I went to Grand Rounds at Parkland when I was 8 or 10. My roots are in Dallas.”

When Kevin was 10 and his father finished his residency, the family moved to Harlingen, where his father began his cardiology practice and opened the first cath lab in South Texas. His father, now 85, still lives in Harlingen and the two remain close.

Growing up in Harlingen, Kevin’s father and his partners influenced him greatly. They were mentors, father figures, hunting and fishing buddies.

“I asked one of them — John Reeder (UT Southwestern ’54) — about being a doctor, and he said to consider two things,” Kevin says. “‘You have to want to take care of sick folks, and there will always be plenty of them.’ That made me start thinking about medicine as a career.”

Although Kevin did well in high school science classes and graduated as the top student out of 700, he was unsure of his next step. He applied to several Texas universities, but had no preference. This changed in the spring of his senior year when his science fair entry took first place in the Rio Grande Valley Science and Engineering Fair. The prize was a trip to the international science fair in South Bend, Ind.

There, Kevin met the dean of admissions from Notre Dame and approached him about attending.

“Son, there’s always room for one more,” the dean said.

Kevin recalls that Charlie Mullins, MD, his father’s friend and cardiology chief at UT Southwestern, also encouraged him.

“I visited him the summer after my freshman year in college,” Dr. Klein says. “I asked him about going to UT Southwestern, and he said, ‘Get here as quick as you can.’”

To speed up the process, he accelerated his education and graduated summa cum laude from Notre Dame in three years. His time in Indiana made him realize that he was a Texan and that he wanted to come home ASAP.

When Kevin enrolled at UT Southwestern in 1977, he planned to be a cardiologist like his father. That changed after he worked

part time in the Anesthesia Department while a senior medical student.

“That’s when I fell in love with anesthesia,” he says. He completed a three-year residency in internal medicine and then a two-year residency in anesthesiology. “I learned how to take care of and be comfortable with the unconscious patient,” he says. “I was good at it; it came easily.”

But he still was committed to the IM residency; he says that completing it was the honorable thing. “No way I was going to bail on the IM program,” Dr. Klein says. “Doing the two residencies provided me with the best medical education I could have. Internal Medicine was THE department at UT Southwestern. Having ties to that department has helped me remain an integrated faculty member.”

Upon graduation, Dr. Klein joined the UT Southwestern anesthesiology faculty and now is a full professor. He practices anesthesiology full time in the operating room, accompanied by medical students and residents.

His ties to Texas and to UT Southwestern are strong. Dr. Klein is one of only three faculty members (along with Drs. Karen Bradshaw and John Truelson) who joined the faculty in 1986 and remains on staff.

With so much time spent at the hospital, it’s not surprising that Dr. Klein would meet his future wife in such a setting.

“I started my internal medicine residency in the ER at Parkland,” he says. “Jorie had just started working. She was the most hard-working and patient-focused nurse I’d ever met, aside from the most beautiful.” She’s been director of trauma nursing at Parkland for 30 years and now also is interim nursing director of the ER.

The Klein medical gene continues with the couple’s children. Son John, 28, is a second-year general surgery resident at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. Allie, 26, is a senior medical student at McGovern Medical School in Houston, focusing on pediatrics and anesthesia. Tori, 19, is a first-year student at Southwestern University in Georgetown, majoring in anthropology.

## Involvement in organized medicine

Dr. Klein joined DCMS as a medical student in 1979, and his membership has led to a depth of involvement he could not have predicted. Medical society membership also was important to his grandfather, who was a DCMS member, and his father, who served as president of the Cameron County Medical Society.

Dr. Klein’s active involvement with DCMS began as a delegate to the TMA House of Delegates — a result of peer pressure.

“John Truelson was a delegate, and he said I should be one, too,” Dr. Klein recalls. “Then Jim Luby called and said, ‘You should volunteer to be on the DCMS board, and I’d like to nominate you.’”

Dr. Klein initially declined, saying he was not qualified but would mull it over.

“The next day I said, ‘OK. As long as you don’t try to make me president.’ Then I visited with Robert Haley, who had been president, and asked for advice. He said, ‘Show up and listen, and you’ll figure it out.’”

Dr. Klein had completed his board term in 2015 when DCMS Past President Todd Pollock, as Nominating Committee chair, asked him to serve as secretary/treasurer of the board for 2017.

“I didn’t begin this adventure thinking about or wanting to be president, but it’s a good thing to serve if asked,” he says.

## Plans for his presidency

Some 7,600 physicians are members of DCMS. That makes

DCMS the second-largest medical society in the country, second only to Harris County (Houston). More than 70 percent of private-practice physicians in Dallas County are members, but Dr. Klein is focusing on the more than 70 percent of UT Southwestern faculty members who are not DCMS members. He’s determined to increase that membership percentage.

He contends that physicians who join DCMS as students likely will remain members throughout their career.

“Many faculty members believe that a medical society is not for them,” he says. “Five years ago, about 50 percent of the faculty were DCMS members. Now, a lot of them are from areas where the tradition of medical society membership isn’t as strong as it is in Texas. I want to educate residents, fellows and academic physicians on the value of medical society membership.”

“For increasing membership in the long term, I’m looking at residents and fellows. We have about 10 percent participation; I think we can get to 90 percent by registering the residents. Once they get in the habit of joining and see the value of medical society membership and opportunities for leadership, they’ll remain members. A lot of them will practice in Dallas; if we can get them early, we’ll see long-term gains. The Dallas community and DCMS have a long history of supporting UT Southwestern’s academic mission.”

Among DCMS projects underway is one with the National Academy of Medicine that is studying how hospitals and nursing fields are addressing working conditions. Dr. Klein also is concerned about physician burnout and wants to get DCMS more involved in what now is termed “physician resilience.”

His DCMS presidency has much support from his UT Southwestern colleagues.

Robert Haley, MD, has known Dr. Klein as a faculty member in anesthesiology at UT Southwestern for more than 25 years.

“He has been a faculty leader deeply involved in patient care at several Dallas-area hospitals, in research in anesthesiology and pain management, and in mentoring medical students and residents,” Dr. Haley says. He notes that Dr. Klein has served for 15 years as the UT Southwestern counselor for the Alpha Omega Alpha honor medical society. “Kevin is a good listener, an empathetic caregiver, a thoughtful decision-maker, and a good organizer,” Dr. Haley says. “We could not do better for our DCMS president.” **DMJ**

— Tracy Casto

“Kevin understands the value of organized medicine. We are fortunate to have him as our DCMS president, for no one could have a broader perspective or be more fully committed to protecting the integrity of the practice of medicine for future generations of patients and physicians.”

— Charles Whitten, MD,  
UTSW Department of Anesthesiology chair  
and longtime colleague