

# FINDING A CAREER IN MEDICINE

From a young age, Dr. Beth Kassanoff-Piper has always had a desire to help others. Along with a strong love of science, Kassanoff-Piper set off on a path that would utilize both qualities—medicine.

By **Samantha Sabio**  
Photos by **Darnell Porter**

**B**ecoming a doctor was not always the clear choice for Dr. Kassanoff-Piper. Shortly before leaving for college, her grandfather inspired her to find a career in medicine. Dr. Kassanoff-Piper's own father received a doctorate degree in education, but her grandfather had a different idea for what kind of doctorate Dr. Kassanoff-Piper should pursue. "He said, 'I want you to be one of those doctors that does somebody some good,'" she recalled with humor. "Because he said that and because I just adored him, I did start out in zoology [and in] a pre-med track," Dr. Kassanoff-Piper said.

Dr. Kassanoff-Piper attended Louisiana State University (LSU). But it wasn't until a class trip to a medical school in her first year of college that she realized medicine was her calling. "We got to go visit the classrooms. We got to go see the anatomy lab," Dr. Kassanoff-Piper remembers nostalgically. "I think it just clicked with me then that that was what I wanted to do." From there, she would forge her medical career.

After graduating from LSU, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper was then faced with deciding where to attend medical school. While she applied and interviewed at a handful of schools, she ultimately chose to go to UT Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. "To me, it just had the best feel to it," she said. "Everybody was just supportive. They weren't afraid to laugh at themselves. They didn't take themselves overly seriously, and so it felt like this great place that you're excited to go to every day." And Dr. Kassanoff-Piper continued to feel this great sense of community and encouragement as she moved through medical school. "It was a ton of work and it was exhausting, but I definitely made the right choice. That was the best place to go." Upon graduation

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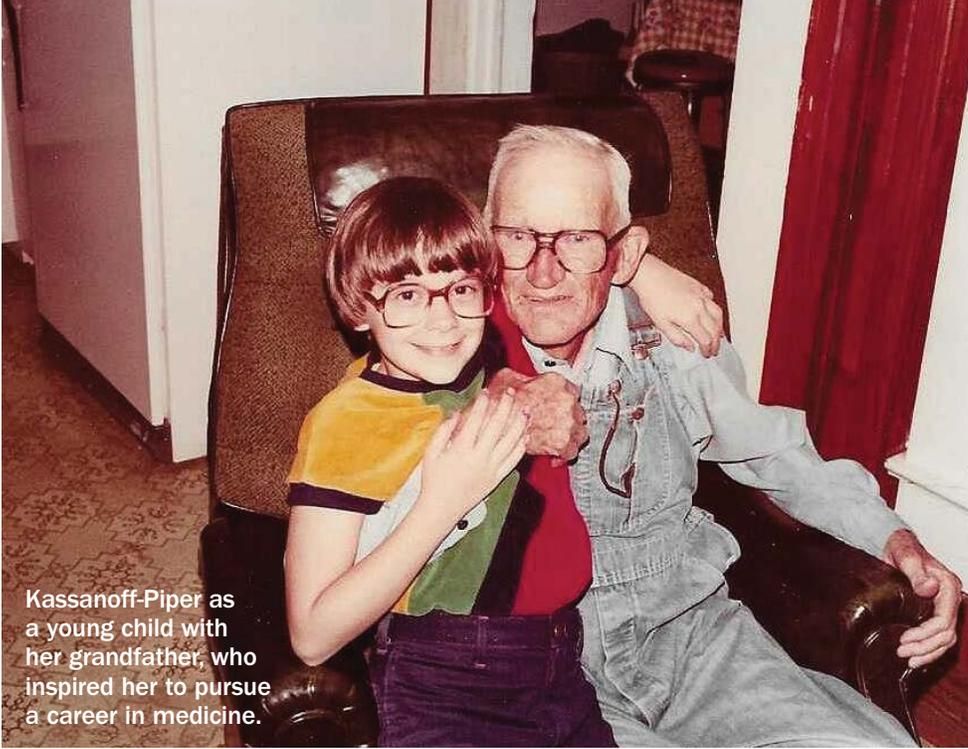
from UT Southwestern, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper was awarded the prestigious Ho Din Award. This academic award seeks to "recognize those who exemplify the unique personal qualities embodied in all great physicians – knowledge, understanding, and, most of all, compassion" and is the highest honor given to an outstanding senior at UT Southwestern Medical School.

In the years following, she left the state for her residency at Barnes Hospital in St. Louis, Missouri, before returning to Dallas to practice. Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has been practicing internal medicine for 21 years. "What I love about internal medicine is that you get to build relationships with people over time," she said. "I see families where I see 10 people in the family, and a lot of them I've taken care of for the full 20 years. I just love that." Dr. Kassanoff-Piper values having an easy rapport with all of her patients. "It's great. I think it's the perfect thing for me."

As Dr. Kassanoff-Piper settled on the best field of medicine for her, she remembered how influential her teachers and mentors were in helping her carve

Dr. Beth Kassinoff-Piper to be installed as the 138th president of the Dallas County Medical Society on January 21, 2021, in a live virtual ceremony.





Kassanoff-Piper as a young child with her grandfather, who inspired her to pursue a career in medicine.



Kassanoff-Piper was inducted into the American College of Physicians in 2015.



Dr. Kassanoff-Piper celebrating Thanksgiving 2020 safely with her family.

this path. Dr. Dennis Stone at UT Southwestern and Dr. John Pippen at Baylor were two such mentors. “They were amazing teachers,” she recalls. “They made internal medicine so interesting and enjoyable. They are definitely the reason I chose my specialty.”

When Dr. Kassanoff-Piper started practicing, she had the help of Dr. Paul Neubach to show her how to apply her knowledge from medical school in the field. “He was my mentor,” she said. “He had such a great bedside manner and such a great rapport with his patients. He really helped me with the art of medicine and how to form those relationships with people.” Today, having relationships with her patients is one of the things Dr. Kassanoff-Piper values most in her work.

She also values the ability to practice alongside peers she’s known since she was in school; Dr. Jennifer Wilkerson and Dr. Raymon Aggarwal. “We know each other really well. We all help each other out,” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper said. “Our skills, in terms of helping with things around the office, are complementary, so we’re able to work really well together as a team.” From patients to mentors to peers, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has found the best profession for bringing together her love of building and helping a strong community.

## Joining a Medical Community

Dr. Kassanoff-Piper joined DCMS in 1992 while she was still in medical school. Minus the years she lived out of town for her residency, she has been a member since. “I’m from a small town,” she said. “Nobody in my family was a doctor or had anything to do with medicine. And so, I realized the benefits that organized medicine could have for people like me.” In organized medicine, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has found a great deal of positive advocacy, volunteer opportunities, and chances to work with people from different places and different specialties. “It was very inspiring [to see], so I wanted to be a part of it,” she said.

DCMS has always been unwavering in its pursuit to advocate for patients and physicians and to promote public health, which are just two aspects in medicine that Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has found to be extremely important in medicine today. “Dallas County Medical Society has this great history of being the voice that the public can trust during public health crises,” she said. “We’ve had great leaders through Ebola and West Nile.” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper also speaks highly of her

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predecessor, Dr. Mark Casanova. “[He] has been an outstanding leader and a great example for me to follow.”

Dr. Kassanoff-Piper commended Dr. Casanova, the CEO, and staff of DCMS for their dedication to helping other doctors in the community, especially through the COVID-19 pandemic. “It’s just so reflective of the great commitment DCMS has to help the medical community as a whole,” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper said. This desire to help others is a great asset to doctors everywhere, and she has seen, and continues to see, this attentiveness in DCMS. “It’s an exciting time to be a part of this group,” she said.

When Dr. Kassanoff-Piper discovered she would be serving as the president of DCMS, she was excited and nervous at this new responsibility. “It was a little bit surprising and such an honor to feel like my peers thought that I could do a great job at this,” said Dr. Kassanoff-Piper about the phone call she received from Dr. Jim Walton, DCMS past president and then chair of the nominating committee. After receiving the call, she spent her year as secretary-treasurer and this past year as president-elect pitching in and learning from everybody around her in order to form a plan for her year as president. “I was really excited because I thought this was a great opportunity for me to be able to give back to the community,” she said, humbled to be nominated for this position.

## Moving Forward

While planning for her year as the president of DCMS, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper listed off goals she wanted to continue and expand upon, as well as objectives of her own. However, with the emergence of COVID-19, she has had to adapt to many changing circumstances. “I had all of these ideas, and then COVID hit, so I think COVID kind of decided [my plans for my presidency] for me,” she said. One of her main objectives is to simply continue the work DCMS has put toward relief plans with regard to COVID-19. “Dr. Casanova has been so great, and of course [I want to] continue the great work

that he’s done as we move into the second year of the pandemic,” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper said. She mentioned maintaining partnerships with the Texas Medical Association and the county’s public health experts and community leaders to provide evidence-based recommendations for the community. Dr. Kassanoff-Piper also wants to focus on improving the general acceptance of vaccines in the community.

Beyond COVID-19-based goals, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper wants to work on increasing membership engagement and membership value for all physicians at DCMS. “I have always gone to almost all of the activities that the medical society has to offer. I feel like you get great fellowship with other physicians,” she said. “But there are so many members who just don’t ever get involved. I think there are ways they would enjoy participating.” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper plans to find ways to offer worthwhile opportunities, in whatever way she can, for all doctors involved with DCMS. “Just to find a way to be inclusive of everybody, I think is really important.” She understands that many physicians seek different things depending on how long they’ve been practicing medicine or their practice model. Providing valuable information and opportunities to all members is a top priority for her.

Along with her own ideas, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has kept in mind the goals of DCMS at large. “We’re starting the process of making a two-year bridge plan. There are some objectives in there that we want to focus on,” she said. Some of these goals include expanding communications throughout the community and implementing resources for broadening member education. Dr. Kassanoff-Piper is looking at her impending presidency as an opportunity to bring together this community of doctors that she has found so welcoming and supportive since she first started in this profession.

Outside of medicine, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper has also found great support in her family during this period in her life. She speaks highly of her parents, her husband and their blended family of six children. “My family is fantastic. They are always incredibly supportive” she said. “They knew that this would take a good bit of time and effort, and they’ve been totally understanding and encouraging of the whole thing.” Dr. Kassanoff-Piper continued her praise for her partners at work as well. “Just total support from everybody in my little circle.”

While she’s not practicing medicine, Dr. Kassanoff-Piper loves spending time with her family and reading mystery novels. She is also looking forward to the day she can travel again. **DMJ**