



Dr. Elliot Shubin, MD

A Profile of a Community-Contributing Physician in The Retirement Years

Elliott Shubin wears a number of different “hats.” He is the Immediate Past President of the San Mateo County Medical Society and the only volunteer OBGYN of Samaritan House, a non-profit organization providing a broad range of services including healthcare to low-income residents within central San Mateo County. This is a full plate for a man who took an early retirement from Kaiser Permanente where he was staff in the OBGYN Department for 23 years.

GETTING STARTED IN THE COMMUNITY – Following a Leader

Elliot Shubin retired from his job as a staff OBGYN at Kaiser Permanente in 1998, after 23 years on staff – an early retirement – because he was not happy with the political and economic changes in medicine. The practice of medicine was being treated like a business. He walked out of Kaiser and one month later walked into Samaritan House. A friend, Dr. Bill Schwartz, a founder of the clinic in 1995, approached him as soon as he retired and told him about his work with Samaritan House. Samaritan House provides food, clothing, shelter, education, legal services and health care to low-income residents of central San Mateo County -- services offered free of charge with the goal of helping its clients become self-sufficient. With over 90% of the monetary support coming from individuals and groups in the community and with the help of 2000 volunteers, Samaritan House has been able to provide help to approximately 15,000 individuals each year. Dr Schwartz, an internist, was 68, and enticed Dr. Shubin to come see the program and start by just volunteering two half-days a month. There are currently over 30 physicians at Samaritan House, most are retired and over the age of 62, and all are volunteers except the Medical Director.

The clinic is very crowded, small, tight and old. But once inside, the camaraderie among the staff and patients is warm and contagious. The atmosphere allows extra time to actually talk with patients. The staff has a wonderful attitude, and as a provider, you get good feedback from the patients, which is very rewarding. The practice of medicine at Samaritan House is ideal – very little paperwork, time with patients, and an opportunity to truly practice preventive medicine and treat chronic health conditions. Physicians get to practice medicine “the way it used to be.” Elliot found his work there to quickly be “habit-forming”. When asked shortly after beginning to pitch in as Acting Medical Director for three months in the Spring of 1999, he gladly did so.

Dr. Shubin is not a stranger to contributing to a greater good. He has been on a four-year leadership track in the San Mateo Medical Society and became the President in 2001. He had been serving the community of physicians – a professional community. But he is finding his volunteer work to be so important that it truly stands out as a rich and reaffirming experience.

MOTIVATION AND VALUES

The main event that inspired Dr. Shubin to become engaged in a community-based project was his retirement (and time) and with it, a stirring interest and restlessness with the business of medicine. He felt it was time to “pay back the community”, to “give back.”

His experience with the Samaritan House has been very inspiring and reaffirmed him of the rewards of medicine. His message to other physicians is, *“If you are aware of the stresses in a medical practice today, just visit the clinic (at the Samaritan House) and you will be reminded of what practicing medicine is really all about. That’s what keeps me going!”* He has also been reminded that all people need the same basic health care – all people are created equal – *“Everyone’s blood is the same color of blood”*, and physician caring must be equitable – *“Nothing influences the quality of your care for a patient – you do the best you can possibly do for everyone.”* He feels, realistically, that the practice of medicine will never go back to what it was before, back to this environment of caring and respect he experiences at the Samaritan House. And the ability to care like this is inspiring.

He feels exposure to an experience like the Samaritan House could inspire both the physicians “in the pipeline” and physicians currently in practice. He shares about residents who have served in the clinic and have been inspired to continue with their medical training when previously close to “dropping out”. Medical students from Stanford University rotate through the clinic and he feels this is a good trend and may have an important impact.

PERSONAL BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

After working in Samaritan House, Elliot feels that the statement, “Medicine is a calling rather than a job” is indeed true. Working at the clinic can remind you of why you went into medicine in the first place. It is personally satisfying to “give back” and to receive back the rewards of appreciation and acknowledgement that are often lacking in the hurried business of medicine today. It is also incredibly valuable to be reminded of who you are as a physician and what motivated you to become a doctor in the beginning of your career.

And all this for one half day a month! It doesn’t take much to reap the benefits – and the more you give, the more you get. A heartfelt thank you from a patient goes a long way. And it is fun!