

Dr. Michael Iversen '89: Detached Retina Helped Alumnus See the “Urgent Care” Light

Growing up in a family of lawyers, Dr. Michael Iversen '89 had always planned to go to law school. But then one night as a sophomore at the University of Texas in Austin, all that changed. “I was watching M*A*S*H,” Iversen said, “and it suddenly struck me that I wanted to study medicine.” He promptly changed his major to biology, and after two more years of studying and 180 hours of college credit, he was ready for medical school.

A number of factors attracted Iversen to the School of Medicine at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA). “I already had one child by the time I entered medical school, and I had another in my third year. So the fact that it was a family-friendly school was important to me. In addition, it had a great campus and was located in a city that offered cultural opportunities and many things to do nearby,” he remarked.

During his medical school experience, Iversen acquired a number of important skills to complement his medical knowledge, including how to persevere, be patient, and go without sleep for long stretches of time. “There were many professors who contributed to my development — some in small ways and others to a larger degree,” he noted. “Dr. Carlos Pestana and Dr. Dan Steale, my advisor, are two who stand out in my mind.”

Despite the long hours and rigorous coursework, Iversen remembers fondly his overall medical school experience, noting in particular the camaraderie that developed among students. “I would have to say that the weekend after Phase Week is one of my favorite memories,” he said. “It was a break in our lives when we could breathe, relax and enjoy life for three days.”

Following medical school, Iversen did his residency in family medicine at UT Southwestern, McLennan County Medical Education and Research Foundation (MCMERF) in Waco, Texas. He then ran a private family practice for a few years and still found time to work in the emergency room (ER).

After managed care underwent major changes in the late 1990s, he returned to full-time ER medicine.

Several years later, he had an experience as a patient that changed his approach to practicing medicine. “In 2003, I suffered a retinal detachment,” Iversen noted. “At one of the leading hospitals in Dallas, I had to wait three hours in a doctor’s office, which was filled with the smell of burnt coffee and the sound of blaring televisions. It was a horrible experience.”

As unsettling as it was, the ordeal helped bring to light the far-reaching negative effects of making patients wait. “It’s bad for the morale of physicians and staff, bad for the bottom line, and — most importantly, bad for patients,” he said.

Following his eye injury, Iversen became interested in developing a more effective and satisfying model for urgent care. While working at a clinic in Fort Worth between ER jobs, he began brainstorming about what the perfect clinic would look like. In 2007, he launched Urgent Doc in Lufkin, Texas, providing urgent care medical services, family medical services, and occupational medicine. Since that time, he has opened another clinic in Livingston, with plans to open a third one in Nacogdoches later this year. Urgent Doc was the first urgent care clinic in Texas and the eighth in the nation to earn The Joint Commission National Quality Approval’s *Gold Certification*.

“We have thought about every aspect of the customer experience — from the time patients enter the clinic, to the greeting at the front desk, the flow through the clinic, and the check-out and departure,” Iversen said. “By not cutting any corners, we have created an environment that maximizes convenience and quality for the patients as well as efficiency for staff and providers.” Urgent Doc uses a range of tools and resources to ensure this high-quality experience, including computer tablets for EMRs based on point-and-click tables, digital X-rays, a floor plan that works well for a high volume of patients, flat screen TVs in the waiting room and exam rooms that play G-rated movies, and good coffee and cookies.

Another key to the success of Urgent Doc is the incentive structure Iversen has created for physicians and staff, which includes comprehensive medical, dental, and retirement benefits along with a generous bonus plan based on patients' "door-to-door" time, the number of patients seen, collections, and patient satisfaction. "Any score lower than 98 percent customer satisfaction voids the bonus," Iversen noted. "And since every employee is a full member of our team, we pay the same bonus to everyone, which equates to roughly 100 to 150 hours worth of their pay each quarter. Because the bonus is the same for the entire team, the pressure to perform is shared by everyone equally."

Looking to the future, Iversen is exhilarated by the opportunity for Urgent Doc to become the first line of primary care because of the clinics' convenient hours, services offered and transparent cost structure. "We are pleased by the East Texas community's acceptance of Urgent Doc," he said. "Creating the clinics has been rewarding because it has allowed me to practice good medicine, work reasonable hours, and shed the old dogma that it is a privilege for the patients to see us. Rather, it is a privilege for us to be able to do what we enjoy while providing the public with much needed urgent care." But despite the success of Urgent Doc, Iversen is not blind to the potential pitfalls that could lie ahead. "Our biggest challenges will be to keep current and open to what the customer base needs and wants, to adapt to competition, and to manage the inevitable changes in regulations and business practices."

Twenty-one years after graduating from the School of Medicine, Iversen has set a new standard for urgent care medicine and built his dream ranch, where he enjoys pursuing hobbies such as team roping, photography, wood-working, training bird dogs, and proper pasture management for his cattle and horses. From a distance of more than two decades, he offered career advice to those students who are just embarking upon their medical studies: "First, do what you love. You will never be good at something you don't love doing. Next, grow as a human being — always strive to grow your soul and body as much as your mind. Remember, you have been given the gift of having learned how to learn; use it daily. Challenge yourself to learn something new every year far removed from medicine."



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Dr. Michael Iversen '89 (left) poses with fellow providers and staff at his Urgent Doc clinic in Lufkin, Texas.