

2009 DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD WINNER

DR. JACQUELINE A. PUGH '81



Left to right: Alumni Relations Director David Perryman, 2009 Distinguished Alumni Award winner Dr. Jacqueline A. Pugh '81, Alumni Board President-Elect Dr. Valerie Pronio-Stelluto '90, and Interim Dean Dr. Glenn A. Half

From an early age, Dr. Jacqueline A. Pugh '81 understood the positive impact that someone committed to social change could make on the lives of others. As a young girl, Pugh frequently traveled with her mother, a trained social worker, to make home visits for St. Vincent De Paul and Caritas of Waco, Texas, a relief organization her parents helped start that provides emergency aid in the form of food, clothing, household items, medication, utility, rent, and mortgage assistance. "I can still recall images of the elderly people we visited," Pugh said. "They were living in homes whose walls were lined with cardboard boxes, making tortillas on wood-burning stoves, using wood pieces to stir their soup." Her father, who was the chief social worker at a VA psychiatric hospital in Waco, helped design the system of personal care residences that brought about the "deinstitutionalization" of chronically mentally ill patients for the VA and is still used today. "As I grew older, I developed a love of science," Pugh noted, "and that love, combined with a commitment to caring for others, pointed the way to medical school."

In high school, Pugh had been interested in reproductive health issues, and in college, she had

studied the medical profession's treatment of women. So, she arrived at The UT Health Science Center San Antonio's School of Medicine with an eye on obstetrics and gynecology. But during her third-year rotations, she became intrigued by the diagnostic challenges of internal medicine, and she was drawn to the rewards of long-term patient relationships that primary care offered. Then, in her fourth year, she took an elective research rotation with Dr. Michael Stern, who taught the second-year epidemiology course and had begun the San Antonio Heart Study a few years earlier. Pugh had the opportunity to analyze data from the study's first survey, and eventually, produced her first publication from that data.

Among her medical school mentors, Dr. Carlos Pestana stands out in Pugh's mind—both for his role as a teacher and as dean of students. "His three-dimensional drawings on the chalkboard were legendary," Pugh noted. "And his ability to explain acid-base status in an understandable way was extremely helpful. We had a few healthy arguments about what *was* and *was not* in students' best interest, but in the end, we had a lot of mutual respect for each other." As for the most important skills or lessons, she

learned as a medical student, Pugh remarked: “the ability to think critically and to truly listen.”

After earning her medical degree in 1981, Pugh completed a residency in internal medicine at Duke University Medical Center followed by a post-doctoral fellowship in general medicine at Duke. She then returned to the Health Science Center to pursue a year-and-a-half fellowship in epidemiology with Dr. Stern, whose work was focused on the increased rate of diabetes among Mexican Americans. During this fellowship, Pugh began looking at whether Mexican Americans also have disproportionately high rates of diabetic complications, in particular, diabetic end-stage renal disease.

After accepting a position on the School of Medicine faculty in 1987, and subsequently, joining the staff at Audie L. Murphy Veterans Hospital, she began looking at better ways to deliver care for diabetes to prevent complications. “My first study in this regard was to assess the feasibility of non-mydratic retinal photos, which are now used widely as a method of screening for diabetic retinopathy,” she said. “I then looked at patient and physician attitudes towards treatment of diabetes—trying to understand why it is so hard for patients to live with and so hard for physicians to treat effectively. From there, I moved on to educational interventions, then organizational interventions—with each step trying to further understand why chronic illnesses are so hard to treat effectively.”

In 1988, Pugh published a paper in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* called “Excess Incidence of Treatment of End-Stage Renal Disease in Mexican Americans,” which documented the high incidence of dialysis treatment among Texas Hispanics. The paper has been cited 140 times by other researchers and is considered by many physicians to be the classic paper on the subject. This work led to NIH funding of a five-year project to examine ethnic differences in diabetes-related end-stage renal disease in Texas. She served as principal investigator of this project, overseeing a total budget of \$1.15 million as well as two related grants totaling nearly \$200,000.

After being granted tenure in 1993 and later being promoted to Professor of Medicine in 1999, Pugh was named the first F. Carter Pannill Jr. Professor of Medicine in 2007. During her 21 years on the School of Medicine faculty, she led the health services research center at Audie L. Murphy Veterans Hospital, served as a preceptor and later director of the medical students’ Advanced Physical Diagnosis course, and sat on numerous committees at the Veterans Hospital, including the Safety Committee, Research and Development Committee, and Quality Improvement Committee. Her election to Fellowship in the American College of Physicians in 2006 reflects the substantial contributions she has made to

internal medicine.

Among her many community service efforts, Pugh volunteers at the Corazon Ministries free clinic for homeless people and is a board member of a women’s giving circle, Impact San Antonio, which gives a \$100,000 project grant each year to a local nonprofit organization. In addition, she gave more than 70 lectures on diabetes mellitus and its management to physicians throughout South Texas as part of the Texas Diabetes Institute research project. She also served as president of the School of Medicine Alumni Association during the 2005-2006 academic year and has served additional terms as president-elect and past-president.

In recognition of her outstanding service to the community and the medical profession, as well as her involvement in the School of Medicine, Pugh received the 2009 Distinguished Alumni Award at Reunion Weekend in October. Of her recognition, she remarked: “I am honored and humbled. There are so many of our alumni who work hard each day to deliver outstanding care to their patients. I hope that I honor them by researching and writing about the hard work that they do. I want to thank the Alumni Association Board for selecting me, as well as thank Dr. Andy Diehl, my boss for many years, who nominated me for this award. Most importantly, I want to thank my parents for giving me my sense of caring and my ambition, along with my husband, Jay, and my children, Dana and Evan, for supporting me so wonderfully throughout my career.”

Calling for Nominees for the 2010 Distinguished Alumni Award

The Alumni Relations Office is calling for nominations for the 2010 Distinguished Alumni Award. To nominate someone, please go to www.SMedAlum.com and follow the Involvement link to the Distinguished Alumni Award page. You can also contact the Alumni Relations Office at medalumni@uthscsa.com or 210-567-0614. The deadline for nominations is **May 31, 2010**.