

The Murmur

Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency Newsletter
June 2022 – Issue 6

Alex McPhedran, MD ~ The Legend



1.3.1929 – 12.17.2021

This newsletter is dedicated to Alex McPhedran, MD – a founding father, mentor, colleague and cherished friend of the residency. Please enjoy a few of the many stories shared:

Rick Hobbs, MD, Class of 1979 and Past Faculty ~

MDFMR (originally known as the Central Maine Family Practice Residency) began in July of 1973. In September of that same year, Alex McPhedran left his position on the neurology faculty at Emory to become curriculum coordinator for the residency. It all seemed so unlikely – highly respected neurologist abandoning his prestigious academic position and moving to Maine, to join a *movement*, no less! You see, in those days, family medicine was a movement, a grass roots movement aimed at providing a compassionate, competent alternative to specialty medicine while also addressing the issue of healthcare shortages in rural areas. So, why did he do it? Because he believed in the cause. He was that kind of person.

Alex's leaving was really felt at Emory. I know this because, as first-year medical students, my classmates and I experienced that loss. In the spring of 1973, we had a pre-clinical course that included a segment on correlative neuroanatomy. Alex participated in teaching that segment. He was such a good teacher! His intelligence, his knowledge and his humanity were all so evident! I remember thinking that I couldn't wait to do a neurology rotation. I saw him as a role model, and I wasn't alone. We all wanted him to stay.

Before knowing Alex, I thought that I probably would go into some technical specialty. After knowing Alex, I began to change. If he thought the new specialty of family medicine had merit, it must be worth exploring. So, I wrote to him and asked if there was any way I could do a student rotation (called a clerkship back in those days) in Maine. He wrote back and said “sure”. So, I spent the summer of 1974 doing my very first clinical clerkship at Central Maine Family Practice Residency. From then on, I knew what I wanted to do. Thanks to Alex, I was convinced that family medicine was not, as my medical school dean had posited, “Just a fad”.

During residency, Alex, Winnie, and their four sons, Alec, David, Tom, and John, were like family. They generously shared their home and their lives with any and all of us. I suspect that this was the origin of the nurturing environment that is still uniquely Maine-Dartmouth.

Forty-eight years have now passed since my first summer in Maine. I can honestly say that from them until his death on December 17, 2021, Alex was my mentor and my dear friend. He taught me so much...about the science of medicine, of course, but also about doctoring, that distinctly human interaction by which we have the opportunity to provide comfort and caring. He also taught me about social responsibility, the need to see the world as through the eyes of the poor, the afflicted, victims of prejudice and oppression. While in Atlanta, Alex and Winnie were, at some personal risk, actively engaged in the Civil Rights movement. In addition to kindness and compassion, I would add courage to the measure of the man.

Alex was truly one of us. To my knowledge, he is the only board-certified neurologist to take advantage of the “grandfather clause” and take the boards in family medicine.

May all of us who have had the privilege of knowing Alex McPhedran and of being guided by his wisdom, nurtured by his kindness, motivated by his scholarship, and inspired by his dedication to patients, honor his memory, cherish the times we had with him, and commit to doing our best, as he would want us to do.

Eileen Fingerman, MD, class of 1992, past faculty, community preceptor ~

I knew Alex for over 30 years. It is a challenge to say the least to find the words to adequately capture the incredible man I came to know and love and admire over those years. I knew Alex initially as a resident, later as a patient, and finally as a friend and colleague. When I was a first year resident, I was hospitalized with aseptic meningitis. One morning, one of the faculty came by to check on me, standing at the doorway calling out “Hey Fingerman, do you know who rounded on you this morning?” This was followed by Alex coming in my room, sitting on my bed, taking my hand, and with great concern asking me, “so tell me Eileen, how are you?”

As a second-year resident, I joined Alex and Winnie at a conference in Hawaii where Alex was speaking. As a resident with limited financial resources, I could not afford the conference hotel, so I stayed at a cabin at a nearby campground. The weather was uncharacteristically rainy to the extent that many of the roads on the island were closed due to flooding. I recall how each afternoon I would call Alex in his room, and he would always invite me up to spend the afternoon with him and Winnie on the veranda, where we sat and talked and watched the endless downpours. I have bad weather to thank for my developing friendship with him and Winnie.

After I joined the faculty, Alex and I precepted together every Wednesday for years. I learned so much from eavesdropping on the conversation Alex had with the residents he was precepting. There were so many pearls of wisdom I learned from Alex. There were of course the many neurological facts he taught me, physical exam findings, etc. But the pearl I remember best is what he said to me after a particular resident, who lacked many social skills, left the precepting room - he looked into his lap, his head shaking side to side ever so slightly, and with dismay said “I can teach them physical exam, I can impart medical knowledge that is lacking, but if they are not a ‘mensch’ by the time they are Bar Mitzvah, I cannot fix that”.

Alex endured depression and dysthymia on and off for years. We fondly referred to him as Eeyore. He suffered tremendously when his son died unexpectedly in an avalanche. And later again when Winnie became ill and passed away. A few months before Alex died I asked him for advice about a close friend of mine whose 24 year old daughter was killed suddenly in a car accident. I remember him telling me that only those who have lost a child know that there is nothing worse to endure. He told me a story about Winnie meeting with her oncologist upon being diagnosed with breast cancer. The oncologist said “I imagine this is the worst thing that you have had to face in your life.” Alex concurred with Winnie’s response “Oh, you have no idea” (referring of course to the death of their son).

I visited Alex often at his house when he became ill and could no longer precept. Some days we talked about his kids and grandkids, other times the books he was reading, and sometimes about how hard it was to be ill and not be able to do what he used to be able to do. He would tell me stories about his other visitors. Alex had so many people who loved him and he loved them. But what I remember most, were the times he spoke about being in touch with folks that he had been in conflict with in the past. No matter how wronged he may have felt, he always told me stories of how he found a way to connect with that person (whether a book they both read, a piece of music they both loved, etc.). He no longer cared to dwell on the conflict in the relationship.

A few months before Alex died, I compiled video clips of people in Alex’s life (current and past) and invited them to share memories of Alex. He so appreciated watching the video and was so moved by all the love. I knew that Alex’s time with us was nearing its end. I knew that after he died we would gather and tell stories and remember him. But I really wanted him to hear those stories while he was still alive. I wanted him to know how important he was to so many people, the ways in which their lives were moved and touched and changed by having him in their lives. I will always be grateful that he was able to do so.

I spoke with Alex only days before he died. I was with my family vacationing in the Virgin Islands. We face timed so I could show him the amazing views of the ocean. He was so appreciative that I had called, minimizing my apologies that I had not found the time to visit him in the week before I left. Alex, as always, the quintessential gentleman.

Nate Harmon, DO, class of 2008 and past faculty ~

I had the great honor of having Dr. McPhedran as a mentor during my residency and geriatric fellowship. He was consistently the smartest person in the room – not just in his experience but in his continual active reading of the literature – however, he never came across as lecturing or correcting, he was in fact, always open to others’ thoughts and viewpoints. He was an amazing diagnostician, both in his amazing history taking ability but also in his physical exam skills. He was amazingly kind and empathic – to patients, residents, staff and colleagues; when he asked you how you were doing, he really wanted to know and would always take the time to listen. When working as a hospitalist, I would often call Dr. McPhedran to present a challenging case, not just in neurology, but in general medicine, to ask for advice to make sure my thought process was correct. My last patient as a resident was a middle-aged woman with three weeks of headaches. On my eye exam, I thought I appreciated papilledema, and thankfully Dr. McPhedran was precepting and saw the patient with me and confirmed my findings – she was found to have metastatic brain lesions on CT imaging later that day. I was so grateful Dr. McPhedran was there that day.

I hope he understood how much we appreciated him, and I hope we appreciated him to the level at which we should have. He will be missed greatly by those of us who knew him and were lucky enough to be trained by him and work with him.

Breanna Glynn, DO – class of 2022 ~

To think of a way to sum up Alex McPhedran in a few paragraphs feels like a disservice to him, in his spirit I will try. I remember the first time I met Dr. McPhedran. He had shuffled in to precept the afternoon clinic at the FMI with his dark brown leather briefcase. He plopped it down on the desk in front of him, and unlatched it open so as to grab a pen, and set to learning about and reviewing our patients for the afternoon. He always sat in the same spot, and I can still picture him there if I try, sitting next to a picture of his cat Floyd, tapping away at the keyboard with his index fingers. He took just as much ownership over my patient's care as I did; whenever we worked together, I remember always feeling like we were caring for these humans together.

Anyone who knows or has worked with Alex will tell you about his commitment to seeing everyone as a human, first a foremost. This would always stand out to me when we worked together. Beyond asking my why the patient was coming to see me, he would always ask about how they are supported, their stressors, and their barriers to care. It would always come back to the humanness and the human struggle for Dr. McPhedran. I hope to always carry this sweet reminder with me; that we are not our diagnoses, our medication lists, our chart alerts, we are all human and we deserve to be seen as such. I will be forever grateful for how his practice of medicine has shaped mine. Pieces and parts of Dr. McPhedran will live eternally as he is woven into the fiber of MDFMR's being; and his legacy will be carried forward through his compassionate and human centered patient care.

Ann Hichborn Byron, Admin Staff ~

The FMI opened its doors in 1973. I came to the practice in 1975. Although our paths didn't cross much in the initial days, I have a vivid memory of Alex from the early 1980s. I was attending my husband's softball game at the Williams field in Augusta on a Saturday afternoon. In the distance, I saw a tall figure in a white lab coat walking towards the spectators. I remember thinking how odd and out of place this person was. As he got closer, I realized it was Dr. McPhedran (w/ stethoscope around his neck) walking straight towards me. With his gentle, kind & reassuring ways that never left him, he told me that my father had experienced a heart attack, was in the emergency room of the then Kennebec Valley Medical Center and that he was here to take me to him. Every single time I think of Alex, I am surrounded by those very same feelings of caring and warmth that enveloped me years ago. He was *one of a kind* indeed. I share deeply in the Residency's sorrow of losing such an amazing friend & mentor.

An outdoor memorial for Dr. McPhedran is planned for Saturday, 7.16.22 at 1:00 PM at his home (30 Tallwood Drive, Readfield, ME). We'd love to see as many alumni and MDFMR community members as possible.

On Sunday, 7.17.22, from 10 AM – 2 PM, you are invited to Dr. Julia McDonald's lakeside home (85 Bumpy Road, Augusta, ME) as the celebration of Alex's life continues. Please bring swimwear, chairs, food to share or just you!

WELCOME TO OUR NEW FACULTY & STAFF

In the past year, we have welcomed the following faculty/staff:

Ellen Richardson, MD	- MDFP
Reuben Baker, MD	- FMI
Olivia Simpson, MD	- Geriatrics
Kathryn Yung, MD	- Psychiatrist - FMI/MDFP
Elizabeth Chesnut, DNP	- Geriatrics
Sarah (Adrian) Rice, PA-C	- MDFP
Julie Cox, CNM	- MDFP
Kenneth Sawyer, PA	- FMI – starts in July
Sadianne D’Andreti, PA	- FMI – starts in July

WHERE ARE OUR 2022 GRADUATES HEADING?

PGY3

Kathleen Dieckmann, MD	- Hospitalist @ Mid Coast
Chris Engdahl, DO	- 12.2022 graduate – plans in progress
Breanna Glynn, DO	- MDFMR ONMM Fellowship
Lara Householder, DO	- MDFMR ONMM Fellowship
Rose Knudsen, MD	- MGMC Hospitalist
Tristan Reynolds, DO	- MDFMR Faculty
Lisa Smith, DO	- MDFMR Geriatric Fellowship
Dianna Gagnon, MD	- Opening a DPC Practice in Westbrook, called Better Health DPC
Rachel Thomas, MD	- Looking forward to finding a balance between Public Health, Health Policy & clinical work
Savannah Wentz Chambers, DO	- Plans to practice outpatient medicine with a focus on women’s health, abortion care, addiction medicine, and primary care

FELLOWS AND PGY4

Catherine Batz, DO	- Graduating in Aug – still working on future plans
Max Schaefer, MD	- Graduating in late July – still working on future plans
Tsung-Yun Tzeng, DO	- Graduating in late July – still working on future plans
Jessica Lucas, DO	- DownEast Orthopedic Associates, PA – Bangor, ME
Mara Nydes, MD	- Plans to travel and eventually practice Sports Medicine

Incoming Residents/Fellows

PGY1

Lucy Algeo, DO	- University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine
Ivy Cass, DO	- University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine
Ben Davison, MD	- Tufts University School of Medicine
Chioma Ibeneme, MD	- Oba Okunade Sijuade College of Health Sciences, Igbinedion University
Sean Lombard, DO	- University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine
Amy "Ace" Madjlesi, MD	- University of Tennessee Health Science Center College of Medicine
Heather Metcalf, MD	- University of New Mexico School of Medicine
Ben Moore, MD	- Saba University School of Medicine
Andrew Smith-Freedman, DO	- University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine
Lauren Struck, MD	- Robert Larner MD College of Medicine at the University of Vermont

FELLOWS AND PGY4

Sports Medicine

Rushal Patel, MD	- Ellis Medicine Family Medicine Residency, Schenectady, NY
Stephen Takasaki, DO	- Rapid City Family Medicine Residency, Rapid City, SD

ONMM & Geri

Noted Above (graduates)

CURRENT FACULTY OPENINGS

The following are open faculty positions in the various Maine-Dartmouth Programs. If you know of anyone who might have the skills for and the interest in any of the following positions, please encourage them to look at the more complete job descriptions and information found on the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency website www.mainedartmouth.org under the headings: Our People, Faculty, Open Positions.

FAMILY MEDICINE faculty position: We are currently recruiting for a FM position at the Maine Dartmouth FP location in Waterville.

DERMATOLOGIST faculty position: We are currently recruiting for another dermatologist to join our practice in the Waterville office.

ALUMNI NEWS

Syed Naseeruddin MD, class of 2007 in 2021 was appointed as president of the Kentucky's Academy of Family Physicians.

Mission Statement

- Educating physicians for a lifetime of competent, compassionate & personally satisfying practice.
- Improving the health of Maine people with particular emphasis on rural areas & underserved
- Promoting the involvement of physicians in the life of the broader community.

Calling All Former Faculty, Fellows and Residents

Would you like to share your life's story since leaving the residency? If so, feel free to email Andrea Abrell, DO at andrea.abrell@mainegeneral.org. We'd love to know what you've been up to all these years so we can share it with our residency community.

We hope you have enjoyed this issue of the newsletter. We anticipate distributing it biannually and we welcome your suggestions on how to improve it. Please let us know what kinds of articles you would like us to include and what topics would interest you. Additionally, if you have information or announcements that you believe would be of general interest to the residency community, please forward them to us for consideration.

Please send suggestions, materials and updated contact information to: jill.freda@mainegeneral.org



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