A family affair

Dr. Robert Weber's ties to KUSM run deep. He was born at Bell Memorial Hospital (the precursor to KU Hospital) in Kansas City, Kan., where his father was a staff physician. Dr. Weber received his undergraduate degree from Kansas University in Lawrence and his M.D. from KU School of Medicine. After medical school he completed an internship in Madison, Wis., where he worked with polio patients during the polio epidemic in the early 1950s. Following his internship, Weber completed his military service obligation to the U.S. Navy before returning to KU for an internal medicine residency. He remained in Kansas City after finishing his residency, initially working at the Kansas City Veterans Administration Hospital then, at KU School of Medicine. Iconic KU physicians, Dr. Mahlon Delp and Dr. Thomas Orr, were among his mentors and colleagues.

Weber and his wife Patricia Ann moved to Salina in 1961, where he started a practice in internal medicine, specializing in infectious diseases, and where he and his wife raised their four children. Weber retired from practice in 1992, but has remained active. Retirement provided an opportunity to spend more time with family and friends and on community service activities. He is extremely proud of his work with the Smoot Charitable Trust that has made significant donations to local charities.

In 2011, Weber became a volunteer instructor at KUSM-Salina, teaching first year medical students many of the basic elements of performing an accurate history and physical exam.

“Salina offered a unique opportunity for me to introduce students to physical diagnosis and to apply their basic sciences right away. Today's students...
Sloo contributes as faculty, standardized patient

As plans for the KUSM-Salina began to take shape and the dream of a medical school campus began to become a reality, retired orthopedic surgeon Dr. Milo Sloo admits he was skeptical at first. “I went to every organizational meeting, and initially I was worried—worried whether the necessary physician buy-in it takes to get this venture off the ground would exist. I went to a few more meetings and that trepidation went away, as I saw more and more physicians pledging their support. It was so encouraging.”

Since opening in 2011, Dr. Sloo has been one of KU School of Medicine-Salina’s staunchest supporters, giving time, energy and financial backing to a campus that has now reached capacity and has sent the first graduating class out into residency programs all over the country. “I felt like the school needed early volunteers—and it was another way I could help. I love teaching and it’s the most exciting thing to confront someone with great intelligence. It is such a challenge and a joy to interact with students.”

Dr. Sloo has volunteered as a standardized patient in the clinical skills lab, allowing students to practice their newly-learned skills in obtaining a history and performing a physical exam. He also supervises a casting workshop where students learn by doing - placing casts on each other. “It’s simple and easy, but fun for them. It’s very hands-on and most of them are going to wind up using the skill at some point in their medical career.”

The student relationships fostered and the knowledge he’s been able to pass on has been one of the most important aspects of the program. He enjoys participating in the early months of a medical student’s education.

“It’s stimulating for me, educational for them. If I can impart some medical wisdom, I’m happy to do it,” he said. “When I was in medical school, the first two years were spent in a classroom and our third year was spent standing around in a white coat. We didn’t get physician interaction until much, much later in our education.”

Since retiring from his practice, Dr. Sloo’s schedule has remained busy. His philanthropy extends beyond the medical school. He serves on the board of directors of several charitable organizations, as well as a handful of bank boards. He and his wife Carol Ann travel regularly (Mexico is a favorite!), and enjoy spending time with their three children and five grandchildren.

Retirement has not dampened his advocacy for the practice of medicine. “I believe we’re about to have a shortage of physicians, and it’s critical that we get behind the effort to train more doctors. This school is a great start in that direction.” In addition to teaching activities, Dr. Sloo and his wife have provided financial support to the Salina campus through the KU Endowment Association and the Salina Regional Health Foundation.

“I know financial support is part of it, and I know it’s needed. I wouldn’t do this unless I thought it would stimulate others to get involved. Hopefully I can generate more interest, support and positivity.”

Dr. Sloo is grateful for the gifts he’s been given, and it is important for him to pay it forward. “I feel that I should be a good steward of the things God has given me in life. What better way than to help train brilliant, young minds to be physicians?”
A family affair

have great enthusiasm and intelligence - interestingly, what I had to get from a textbook they now obtain from smartphones. They’re extremely well-informed.”

In addition to imparting knowledge and wisdom to novice medical students, Dr. Weber and his wife Patricia have established an endowed fund through the KU Endowment Association in support of KUSM-Salina. A portion of the earnings on this fund are earmarked for medical student scholarships. Another portion of the earnings fund the Robert W. Weber, M.D. and Patricia Ann Weber Award for Outstanding Scholarship and Professionalism - given annually to a graduating medical student.

None of Weber’s children chose a career in medicine but his grandson, Chris Rupe, followed in his footsteps. Chris received his undergraduate degree from KU in Lawrence and his M.D. from KU School of Medicine, followed by a general surgery residency at KUSM-Wichita. Along the way he met and married Abbey, who also attended KU as an undergraduate and KU School of Medicine. She completed a residency in pediatrics at KUSM-Wichita. Following residency training, Chris and Abbey moved to Salina, where Chris is a busy general surgeon at the Mowery Clinic and Abbey is a pediatrician at Salina Family Healthcare Center.

Chris recalled a life-changing event with his grandpa, one that led him to his career in medicine.

“When I was five, my grandfather did an echocardiogram of my heart, and I thought it was the most amazing thing I’d ever seen. He told me what a great profession medicine is, and I have never wanted to do anything else since then,” Rupe said. “He [grandfather] is certainly right, medicine is a wonderful profession. It has been great to be a part of the medical community that my grandfather helped create. I frequently see patients that were patients of his, and it is wonderful to hear how much he helped them.”

Abbey has her own story.

“My youngest sister was born with a congenital heart defect. Growing up with her and seeing the relationships our family formed with her doctors led me to medicine and pediatrics.”

In addition to their clinical practice responsibilities and raising their two children, Katelyn and Colin, both Chris and Abbey are active in teaching KUSM-Salina medical students. Both strongly believe that working with medical students makes them better physicians. “Medical students keep us on our toes. We can’t just do what we’ve always done. We have to know what we’re doing and why we’re doing it,” said Abbey.

For Chris, teaching and giving back to his alma mater has been an enriching experience. “I benefited from good training and now I hope my students benefit from my teaching.”

Abbey echoes that sentiment, “It’s a pay-it-forward thing. Now it’s my turn to help others achieve their goal. Also, donating locally and seeing the impact it can make is very rewarding.”

Dr. William Cathcart-Rake recognizes that the Weber-Rupe’s service to the school has been vital to its success.

“They have supported us from day one, and I know that everyone in the KU School of Medicine family appreciates what the Weber-Rupe family means to the school.”

Finding time to volunteer during the busy years of medical school isn’t easy, but our students have gone above and beyond the call of duty with a commitment to community. Students have given countless hours of time and energy to many organizations. Whether collecting food for the local food bank, volunteering to take blood pressures, presenting at career fairs for high school students, working with summer camps, assisting the elderly, or spending time with children, our students have truly represented the spirit of Christmas throughout the entire year.