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Media Contact: Toniann Richard, 816.249.1529, Toniann@hccnetwork.org

Live Well's Dr. McFadden Forgoes Retirement at 90 to Continue Seeing Patients

Open House to Commemorate Birthday, Years of Service Planned for August 19 at Waverly Community Building

Kidding Gene McFadden, M.D. about still practicing medicine at 90 never seems to get old – and neither does he. McFadden was born in 1928, the same year as Mickey Mouse and penicillin. Despite his age, McFadden is nowhere near ready to hang up his stethoscope. “They gave up on trying to get me to retire,” he said. “I’m leaning a little, but I’m still upright.”

“There’s simply no one like him,” said Toniann Richard, CEO of the Health Care Collaborative (HCC) of Rural Missouri. “He brings well over a half century of knowledge, expertise, compassion and dedication to medicine. He has withstood every ebb and flow in the health care industry – unscathed. There’s absolutely no reason for him to stop now.”

The Early Years

McFadden, who served in the Army during the Korean War, earned his undergraduate degree in biology from Central Methodist University in Fayette, Mo. in 1949. Afterwards, he applied to medical school at Kansas University and graduated in 1959 as an MD. By the 1960’s, he was a specialist. “You started off as a hotshot in the E.R., delivered babies, and evolved to surgeries,” he said. McFadden has fond memories of bringing new life into the world. Over the years, he figures he’s placed about 1,500 newborn infants into their parents’ arms.

Founding Waverly Clinic

In the 1980’s, McFadden was pushing 60 and could have been winding down his practice. Instead, he and four other doctors established a rural health clinic in Waverly, Mo. From the beginning, the Waverly Clinic cared for both locals and migrant workers. The Clinic was later renamed the Live Well Community Health Center – Waverly. It is owned and operated by HCC, which also operates Live Well Centers in Buckner, Carrollton, and Concordia.

“Originally, the Waverly Clinic was started for migrant workers, one or two evenings a week,” McFadden says. “We still frequently treat migrant workers, doing labs and giving referrals to specialists as needed. We take care of everyone, whether they have insurance or not.”

As you can imagine, McFadden’s seen a lot of change over his six decades in medicine. When he started out, house calls were routine. Then office visits became the norm. Now, telehealth technology has gained ground as a valuable diagnostic tool in serving remote patients. Paper charts are giving way to electronic records.

Diseases and lifestyle choices leading to disease are being detected earlier. While some conditions (such as obesity) have worsened, once-feared killers like smallpox and polio have been eradicated.

Living Well

Today, McFadden's work at the Live Well Center in Waverly is focused on adult and geriatric care. "I'm on four days a week, Monday through Thursday," he said. "I see 140 to 150 residents each month at six nursing homes, then another 120 to 130 patients in the clinic."

He's never tried doctoring in the city because doctoring in the country is where his heart is. "In the rural clinic, you have more freedom – and no traffic on the way to work!" he said. Some of his patients have literally known McFadden their whole lives, since the day he delivered them. "Everybody calls everybody by their first names. They call me 'The Mac' or 'Doc.' They confide in me and tell me their feelings. That's between us; I help take care of them with the emotional part as well as the medical part."

He values having more one-on-one time with patients. "In the clinic setting, it's not just going in and sitting down with your back to the patient and typing into your computer. I look them in the eye; listen to what they're saying and the expression on their face. It's reading each other and getting the feel of the situation. I believe a doctor should be a partner in medicine with their patients."

"Young health care practitioners entering into the field of medicine would do well to take pages from Dr. McFadden's notebook," Richard said. "His style and manner of person-centered care was established well before 'person-centered care' ever became a health care standard. What he has brought to this community, his patients and to all of us who work with him is truly invaluable. We are all so very grateful."

So, What's Next?

"I want to keep on like we're doing, with the freedom to see patients and take care of them," McFadden said. "I want to know them, know their families." Retirement holds little appeal for him. "I don't like simply looking at four walls. I like to work; I like being active." Three free days a week is just right for spending time with friends and family. "We drive around, we play in the yard, we have horses, and we horse around!"

Join us Sunday, August 19

HCC and the McFadden family invite the public to an Open House on Sunday, August 19 to commemorate Dr. McFadden's 90th birthday. The celebration takes place from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the Waverly Community Building.

For more information, contact the HCC at 660.259.2440 or visit HCCNetwork.org.