

Tarheel Footprints in Health Care

Recognizing unusual and often unsung contributions of individual citizens who have made health care for North Carolinians more accessible and of higher quality

Recognizing Daniel Stroup, MD Hayesville, NC



Daniel Stroup, MD

When the National Health Service Corps was established in 1968, its goal was to recruit enthusiastic physicians to practice in remote and underserved areas. The expectation was that they would find their mission in these rural places and remain there as the community doctor. That ideal outcome was not often achieved but there is at least one example of an ideal outcome in western North Carolina in the hills above Lake Chatuge.

In 1982, Dan Stroup came back to North Carolina as a National Health Service Corps scholar. He had just finished his family medicine residency in Waukesha, Wisconsin and was recruited by the North Carolina Office of Rural Health to a practice in Hayesville in Clay County. Twenty-five years later, Dr. Stroup is still there but he's much more than the "town doc," he's the leader of a progressive and modern medical practice of 3 physicians, a nurse practitioner, and a physician assistant serving the local hospital, a nursing home, and the citizens of Clay and Cherokee counties.

The Chatuge Family Health Center, which has offices in Hayesville in Clay County and Murphy in Cherokee County, is known for its progressive outlook and early adoption of quality-enhancing technology. The practice has an electronic medical record system that links into the PTR-Net quality management system, a regional system of disease management and care coordination. This dedication to keep up with the latest in medical care is one of the characteristics of Dr. Stroup that combines old-fashioned community care with the best and latest medical information and the mechanisms to apply that information to care.

Dr. Stroup supports the local schools and their sports teams in both Clay and Cherokee Counties as well as taking care of patients in the local nursing home, acting as Medical Director, and taking call for the hospital in Murphy. He has also served an 11-year stint as County Medical Examiner and currently is on the Murphy Hospital Authority Board. These supporting roles are done to enhance the scope and quality of the primary care practice and are done on a voluntary basis. All this keeps Dr. Stroup away from his other love, kayaking the Ocoee River in nearby Tennessee.

The people who work with Dr. Stroup see him as a "firm but fair" leader who treats everyone equally—patients and staff alike. He acts as the supervising physician for a nurse practitioner, Judith Wikstrom, who has been with the practice for 12 years, and a physician assistant, John Tucker, who joined the practice in 2004. Dr. Stroup was instrumental in recruiting his physician colleagues to the community. Dr. Theresa Heavner came in 1990 and Dr. Matthew Molison, another National Health Service Corps scholar, arrived in 1997. Both have found a permanent home in Hayesville.

Dan Stroup is something of a "model" for how the National Health Services Corps can work. But it requires special people with dedication and the drive to build up as well as just "fill-in" a place. It also requires the support and assistance of organizations like the NC Office of Rural Health and Community Care, which brought Dr. Stroup together with the people of Hayesville, as well as the support of colleagues and patients, to make rural primary care in the North Carolina mountains a leader in quality.

The editors of the *North Carolina Medical Journal* are pleased to recognize Dr. Daniel Stroup for his service and dedication to provide access to quality health care in rural North Carolina.