Celebrating the Past, Present, and Future

Medical Alumni Weekend Refortifies Miller Ties

Part family reunion, medical convention, and weekend-long excuse to party, Medical Alumni Weekend 2008 gave participants a unique opportunity to soak up the Miller School’s illustrious past, its prestigious present, and its ultra-bright future. Sometimes all at the same time!

The essence of Medical Alumni Weekend is about ties that bind—it’s an annual reaffirmation of the passion and dedication that lead one to pursue medicine, regardless of age and generational differences.

This year’s event was no different. The proceedings got under way Friday, March 7, with a nod to the weekend’s academic component. A continuing medical education seminar (CME) on Global Vascular Risk Prevention was conducted by recently recruited stroke expert Ralph Sacco, M.D., M.S., who chairs the Department of Neurology.

The latter part of March 7 was set aside for something that’s been a Medical Alumni Weekend staple for eight years: freshman pinning. Named the John G. Clarkson Freshman Pinning Ceremony two years ago, after Dean Emeritus John Clarkson, M.D. ‘68, the ceremony provided one of the weekend’s unforgettable moments—the joyful bowing toward the throngs of 179 Miller School freshmen on the verge of getting pins signifying their welcome into the Miller School family.

The accompanying roar from the medical students’ friends and family members was equally impressive, as freshman pinning unfolded under a large white tent pitched on the Schoninger Research Quadrangle.

Pascal J. Goldschmidt, M.D., the Miller School’s senior vice president for medical affairs and dean, smiled as he told the students that medicine is entering a fascinating phase where stem cells are being used to combat diabetes, and Pharmacogenomics of Antidepressant Treatment Response was entrusted to Julio Licinio, M.D., chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.

Understanding the Biology of Adult Stem Cells was the responsibility of Joshua Hare, M.D., chief of the Cardiovascular Division and director of the new Interdisciplinary Stem Cell Institute, who recently came from The Johns Hopkins School of Medicine.

Up next was Miller School graduate Jorge J. Guerra, Jr., M.D. ’72, the medical school’s associate vice president for clinical affairs. Guerra, who’s also chief medical officer of the University of Miami Medical Group and committee advisor to the Medical Alumni Association, explained to alumni how the new UHealth System is collaborating with community practitioners to improve patient care.

Next on the agenda was the Scholarship Donor Recognition Luncheon, which gave Miller School students an opportunity to personally thank alumni and friends who support them on a regular basis.

“Scholarships and grants are critical,” Bernie Nasbaum, M.D. ’79, co-chair of the John K. Robinson Fund, told those gathered at the luncheon. “It is only through the generosity of our alumni and friends that we can increase the number of students receiving scholarships and address the rising cost of medical education.”

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After the banquet was over and Clarkson had been inducted into the pantheon of Miller School greats, alumni danced the night away in various Biltmore ballrooms.

Sunday was marked by the Sixth Annual Senior Class Golf Classic at Melreese International Links. Also, the Coral Gables Hispanic Society conducted tours of the Biltmore, which included an explanation of the Miller School’s origins in the building.

Afterward, those who participated in Medical Alumni Weekend 2008 trekked back to their respective hometowns, having refortified their ties with their Miller School companions until it’s time for Medical Alumni Weekend 2009.
Butcher, baker, and candlestick maker may be the only vocations Ferdie Pacheco, M.D. ‘58, hasn’t pursued in his 80 years on the planet. A gifted raconteur with a salty tongue and zero tolerance for political correctness, Pacheco has been a pharmacist, physician, broadcaster, author, and painter.

Want more? How about military officer or boxing insider who traveled the globe as one of Muhammad Ali’s corner workers? Pacheco’s been there/done that over the course of a colorful, eclectic life, and he’s not bashful about sharing his experiences—or opinions. Like his take on Mike Tyson, whom Pacheco encountered during his 25-year career as a boxing analyst for NBC and then Showtime.

“I went to interview him a couple of times,” Pacheco recalls, relaxing in a room of his northeast Miami home that serves as an art studio. “I said, ‘Mike you really need treatment. You ought to get out of boxing and spend a year to straighten your head up. Right now, you’re so (messed) up that you don’t know which way you’re going!’”

Known as “The Fight Doctor” during his announcer days, Pacheco laughs uproariously. “He was mad as hell at me,” he recounts. “I said, ‘Join the club!’” Pacheco peers mischievously over his glasses, clearly delighting in the shock value an unexpected verbal left hook can deliver.

Yet behind the pugnacious facade lurks a sensitive soul that enables Pacheco to make money as a painter, despite having no formal art training. He’s also a humanist who ran a general medicine practice in one of Miami’s poorer neighborhoods, Overtown, for 25 years and routinely treated people regardless of ability to pay.

Pacheco’s a complex man whose intellectual curiosity burns as brightly now as it did when he entered medical school more than half a century ago. It also doesn’t hurt that he’s as competitive as all get out.

“You’ve got to be imbued with a desire to be the best,” Pacheco says. “I mean, I go to an art show, and I’m just looking at the paintings saying, ‘I can do better than that! I can do better than that!’

“That’s the way I went through my whole life.”

Pacheco’s odyssey started in Tampa, where his Spanish-American father worked as a pharmacist. After earning degrees in biology and chemistry from Spring Hill College in Alabama, Pacheco followed in dad’s footsteps by receiving a pharmacy degree from the University of Florida.

Following military service, Pacheco went to medical school at the University of Miami and then practiced in Overtown. His interest in boxing and his outrage over the fact that Miami-area black boxers were often denied emergency medical treatment due to Jim Crow, prompted Pacheco to start working as a corner man in local arenas and gyms. It led to an association with Muhammad Ali, which led to a lengthy broadcasting career.

Pacheco, who compiled a book of his medical cartoons and passed it out during his class’s 50th reunion at Medical Alumni Weekend, hasn’t practiced medicine since 1980 or announced a fight since 2002.

Does he miss the “sweet science”? “No, I hate boxing!” Pacheco barks. “Because it’s in disarray.” Medicine, though, is a different story.

“I miss medicine,” Pacheco says. “I miss the contact with the patient and me getting him well. That is holy to me. That is holy. But the rest of the (stuff) that goes with it, all the paperwork ... all the arguing with Medicare and Medicaid ... no, I don’t miss that at all.”

The author of 16 books and the creator of innumerable paintings, Pacheco says he thought he’d be ready to die at 80, but he’s having so much fun now that he wouldn’t mind seeing the odometer hit 90.

Surrounded by books, as well as military hats from various wars, Pacheco gestures at a portrait. “This was the hardest painting I’ve ever done,” he blurts, smiling. “It was hard not to make this woman look ugly! Men, on the other hand, the uglier they are, the better the painting comes out.”

Some people might disagree with that—which would probably please irascible Ferdie Pacheco to no end.
Perril Elizabeth Young, M.D. ‘99, is an internist with a private practice in her hometown.

Born and raised in Miami, Perril Elizabeth Young, M.D. ‘99, is an internist with a private practice in her hometown. I run a high-end practice, call referring physicians personally, and give out my cell phone number for emergencies. I have a special interest in women’s issues and promote breast health in a pro-active manner. I am proud that I take care of my entire family, all my close friends and their families, my children’s teachers, and even some of my own teachers. I also provide health care to many other integral members of our community and do so right next to the hospital where I was born! I run into my patients everywhere I go and, more importantly, they seem happy to see me!

Person who influenced me most in medical school: Some doctors who I love are Mark O’Connell, Karl Muench (who was my second-year mentor), Alex and Hilit Mechaber, Daniel Lichtstein, and Maureen Lowery.

Personal accomplishment I’m proudest of: My family, Sean and I, met in medical school at orientation and were married the week after we were on the local news.

What about medical school could have been improved?: We were in the first year of a new numerical grading system, and the compulsive med students were literally freaking out about getting a percentage and not a letter grade. This grading system was improved and enhanced in subsequent years. Rudos to those involved in that progress.

The Poet’s Corner

The Poet’s Corner is a showcase for alumni who regularly feed their muse. If you have a poem or essay 600 words or shorter that you’d like to share, please forward it to: Glennis Weiss Rodriguez, director for Medical Alumni Development, at gweisundmd@miami.edu.

Say a Little Prayer

By Julian Haber, M.D. ’61

I sat at a small desk in the corner of the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit of a large teaching hospital in San Antonio. My eyes strained against the dim light as I finished my chart notes for December 24, 1963. At 2 a.m. only one nurse patrolled the ward. The

outside corridor were void of traffic, except for an occasional orderly or intern. A solitary infant occupied the room as the attending physicians discharged all the other patients for the holidays. We lost more than 50 percent of our babies from cardiac surgery in the early ’60s. This infant struggled to survive. Less than four pounds, her translucent skin bore a large bandage across her chest and a small intravenous needle in a scalp vein provided fluid and nutrition and controlled blood pressure.

Plastic tubing protruded from her thorax to a bottle of water on the ground. The tube in her throat was fastened securely to a respirator that made a loud whooshing sound every few seconds.

Out of the corner of my eyes I saw our pediatric cardiologist approach the little one. A tall man with coarse features and a balding head, he placed his stethoscope first on the neonate’s chest and then sides. His large hands swept across the infant’s abdomen feeling for an enlarged liver or spleen. Racing his medical instruments on the table, he glanced at the green luminance of the EKG and other monitoring devices. He took a deep breath, sauntered to a nearby sink, and poured a small amount of water into a white paper cup. He returned to his athenian. The monitor’s bell began to ring and he made an adjustment on the breathing machine until the dangerous ceased. He placed a small amount of water on the child’s forehead and made a symbolic cross with his finger. His lips moved as he whispered a short, barely audible prayer.

As he left the darkened room, his glance caught mine for the first time. He put his hand on my shoulder and pressed it firmly. “Son, in my business you need all the help you can get,” he said. He then disappeared into the adjoining hallway, his long white coat rhythmically moving to the pace of his steps.

Julian Haber, M.D. ’61, currently serves as developmental behavioral pediatrician for Cook Children’s Medical Center at the Child Study Center in Fort Worth, Texas. Haber is the author of ADHD: The Great Misdagnosis.
1970s
Robert Leo, M.D. '77, has offered to be a full-time volunteer physician in the Good Samaritan Clinic, a health center located in Morgantown, North Carolina. Leo had previously been an emergency room physician at Grace Hospital, a not-for-profit Morgantown health care facility committed to providing affordable care to local residents.

1980s
John Richmond, M.D. ’81, has been named medical director of Genesis Behavioral Health, a community mental health center with facilities in Laconia and Plymouth, New Hampshire. Richmond, a psychiatrist who lives in Concord, New Hampshire, was previously chief of the Department of Behavioral Health at Ireland Army Community Hospital in Kentucky.

Dan Barry, M.D. ’82, a former astronaut who participated in three space shuttle missions, has created a company that makes robotic assistants for people with disabilities. Barry launched Denbar Robotics subsequent to retiring from NASA in 2005.

Celia M. Witten, M.D. ’82, Ph.D., is director of the Office of Cellular, Tissue and Gene Therapy and the Food and Drug Administration’s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research. She worked for more than ten years as a practicing physician at the National Rehabilitation Hospital in Washington, D.C., before joining FDA as division director for General, Restorative and Neurological Devices and Radiological Health.

Russell Eggert, M.D. ’84, is the Florida Department of Health’s director of disease control. Eggert recently wrote an op-ed piece stating that schoolchildren are not a high-risk group vis-à-vis methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). Eggert is a fellow of both the American College for Preventive Medicine and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Ernest F. J. Block, M.D. ’86, graduated from the University of Tennessee’s Physician Executive MBA program in December. “The program has helped me see the world from a different perspective—as a physician leader with the analytical approach of business,” he says.

Mark Eisenberg, M.D. ’88, is the new chief of neurosurgery and director of the neurosurgery residency program at Long Island Jewish Medical Center in New Hyde Park, New York. He is also a clinical assistant professor in the New York University neuroscience department.

1990s
Carlos Nunez, M.D. ’93, is the chief physician executive for Picis, a health care information technology solutions firm based in Wakefield, Massachusetts. Prior to joining Picis in 2000, Nunez had been director of education and research for the division of critical care medicine at NorthEast Medical Center in Concord, North Carolina. Nunez has published and presented extensively on the topics of anesthesia and critical care informatics, clinical data analysis, cerebral blood flow autos-regulation, and anesthesia history.

Rick Baker, M.D. ’98, is the chief of family medicine at the Indian River Medical Center. Nancy Baker, M.D. ’98, has a family medicine/urgent care practice in Vero Beach, Florida. Baker is also the medical director for her local Red Cross chapter and is the clerkship director in family medicine for the Fort Pierce campus of Florida State University.

Jason Goldman, M.D. ’98, is a solo practitioner in family medicine in Coral Springs, Florida. He and his wife, Joy, are expecting their second child in May.

In Memoriam
Reginald J. Stambaugh, M.D. ’59, died at his Palm Beach home in December 2007 at the age of 77. Stambaugh worked as an ophthalmologist and was the founding chairman of Ophthalmic Mutual Insurance Co., which provides insurance to ophthalmologists.

BEST&BRIGHTEST
Profiles of exceptional Miller School students

A Miller School senior and sophomore are the first recipients of an award created to spur on budding physician-scientists.

Christine Dinh, a member of the class of ’08, and Seth Miller, ’10, have been presented with the Dr. Carl and Barbara Alving Endowed Award, which is for the student with the most outstanding research achievement during the school year. Dinh’s and Miller’s projects were deemed exceptional enough that the inaugural award was given to both of them, instead of a single winner. The two were among 21 candidates who had their work assessed by six judges. Dinh’s research focused on the manner in which auditory hair cells undergo cell death in trauma-induced hearing loss, while Miller’s examined RNA differences in metastatic, very primary tumor cell lines. The students split a one-time gift of $3,000.

“This prestigious award inspires students like me and Seth to ask difficult questions that challenge us to use what we’ve learned,” Dinh says. “Expenses in medical school are increasing every year, so it’s nice to have a little extra money on the side.”

Winning the Dr. Carl and Barbara Alving Endowed Award was a “culminating event” in Miller’s view.

“A career in research, especially when you’re a medical student and time tends to be very limited, can be very frustrating,” Miller says. “There’s a high rate of failure in research. So to have an award like this, recognizing the work that you’ve done, is very encouraging and uplifting.”

A married couple that both have M.D. degrees, Carl and Barbara Alving made a $100,000 gift to the Miller School to endow the award. Carl Alving, M.D. ’56, heads the Department of Vaccine Production and Delivery in the Division of Retrovirology at the Walter Reed Army Institute for Research.