Inside Criminal Minds

ALUMNUS MICHAEL WELNER IS ONE OF THE NATION'S TOP FORENSIC PSYCHIATRISTS

A stronauts and infantrymen don’t have anything on Michael Welner, B.S. ’84, M.D. ’88, when it comes to repeated forays into perilous, unsettling territory.

As one of the nation’s top forensic psychiatrists, Welner regularly plumbs the innermost workings of society’s most damaged psyches in a bid to divine order from seeming mental mayhem. He then issues findings for attorneys involved in high-profile criminal and civil trials.

“Nothing compares with the intellectual stimulation of forensic psychiatry,” says Welner, who graduated from high school at 15 and was dissecting cadavers in U.M.’s medical school by the time he was 19. “It’s very hard work.”

Welner discusses his vocation with a high-speed torrent of words and ideas that make his excitement crystal clear. Ditto his sense of trepidation.

“The down side of what I do is that you encounter choices people make that are very disgusting and that make you ashamed to be part of the same human race,” Welner says.

Founder and chairman of The Forensic Panel, a Manhattan-based forensic science consultation practice, Welner was the chief prosecution witness in the second trial of Andrea Yates, the Houston nurse who drowned her five young children in a bathtub in 2001. Conversely, Welner also works on the defense side of the aisle.

“So much of what forensic psychiatrists do has nothing to do with death,” Welner observes. “That’s a misconception. A lot of it has to do with justice, in the sense that you’re providing answers that help your community determine what is right.”

An expert witness in nearly 100 trials, Welner had zero interest in psychiatry during the first half of his medical school career. The Pittsburgh native was juggling two major transformations once med classes got underway—...in addition to becoming a doctor, the precocious teenager was learning to be a man.

“When you start acting like a physician—and that’s what you are doing as a medical student—you really have to start seeing people through their own eyes,” he recalls. “It really makes you grow up.”

Psychiatry turned Welner’s head during a psych rotation at the Miami VA Medical Center. “I don’t think that there’s any specialty that engages the human element the way that psychiatry does,” Welner says. “You have to listen to your patient in a way that enables you to know them on a number of different levels, which I find intellectually and personally satisfying.”

An introduction to forensic psychiatry that can only be described as fortuitous occurred during the fourth year of Welner’s psychiatry residency at Beth Israel Medical Center in Manhattan. Welner was dismayed to find a forensic psychiatry class was part of his training.

“I thought, well look, I’m not going into forensic psychiatry,” Welner says, marveling 16 years later how he nearly missed his calling. “I showed up for the next to last class,” he says. “And wouldn’t you know they had a videotape during that class about a teenager who killed his entire family! The question posed to us was: ‘Can you watch this interview and tell us whether it meets the standard for an insanity defense?’”

Totally fired up by that experience, Welner signed up for a forensic psychiatry fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania, concurrent to his Beth Israel psychiatry residency. He managed that by catching a 4:30 a.m. train to Philadelphia, then returning to Manhattan later in the day for his residency duties.

“I was bred to be in forensic psychiatry,” gushes Welner, who’s created a psychiatric matrix known as “The Deterimenty Scale” to assist juries.

A defining moment in his career took place in 1995. A young attending physician at the time, Welner was asked by one of New York City’s top defense attorneys to tackle a much-publicized criminal case. Opposing counsel had retained the services of a forensic psychiatrist acknowledged to be one of the Big Apple’s top dogs.

While speaking to the defense attorney, Welner was in disbelief. “My first reaction was, ‘What do you want with a guy like me? I’m so young and inexperienced!’” Welner says, still sounding shocked. “I hung up the phone and said to myself—‘Cool! Did you just turn down that case! What’s the matter with you?’”

Coming to grips with his intimations, Welner took the case and vowed at the very least to outwork the prosecution’s forensic psychiatrist. The defense prevailed, putting Welner on the map in forensic psychiatry and legal circles.

A workaholic who travels frequently and spends anywhere from 12 to 15 hours conducting forensic psychiatry interviews, Welner two years ago married Orli Hacker, a corporate lawyer.

“What I associate with her is strength, goodness, warmth, happiness, and consistency,” Welner says of his partner. “Orli is a constant source of light. It’s something that perhaps I would not have appreciated as much were I not exposed to so much darkness.”
I magine parachuting into a strange world where everyone—teachers, classmates, neighbors—babble in an exotic new tongue, making you utterly dependent on a dog-eared French/English dictionary, the kindness of strangers, and mother wit.

So it was for Frederic Guerrier, M.D. ’81, immediately after arriving in Miami from Port de Paix, Haiti, when he was 16. His initial sense of feeling overwhelmed and vulnerable has given Guerrier a unique window on what many patients experience.

The big-hearted family medicine doctor always goes the extra yard for them, dispensing smiles and disarming jokes along the way.

In private practice in St. Petersburg, Florida, Guerrier began doing pro bono work the second Tuesday of each month for the St. Petersburg Free Clinic in 1982. During the intervening 26 years, he’s never missed a Tuesday. Guerrier also gives $2,000 every year to a St. Petersburg college scholarship fund for underprivileged children.

“I’ve got a very good life,” says Guerrier. “So the least I can do is give some of it back.”

Since getting out of medical school, Guerrier has been faithfully chipping away at debts of gratitude he says are due UM, his patients, and his mom, Denise Pierre Louis.

“My mother is a beautiful story,” Guerrier says of the woman he and his five siblings went to college—the University of Miami, University of Florida, Florida International University, and the University of South Florida—and all earned degrees.

But first Guerrier had to graduate from Miami Jackson Senior High School, which he entered speaking Creole only. “I had to have a dictionary in front of me at all times,” he says of an educational journey that allowed him to enroll in the University of Florida as a chemistry major.

Which was amazing, because I didn’t speak any English,” Guerrier chuckles. “In math and science, if the equation comes out okay you don’t need to speak English!”

Unable to afford a car, Guerrier rode his bicycle throughout UF’s campus and Gainesville. Stirling academic achievement paved the way for admittance into UM’s medical school.

After returning to Miami, Guerrier moved back in with his mother. Rain or shine, he bicycled to med classes from his home near NW 36th Street and NW 9th Avenue, a 2.3-mile trek each way. Weary of relying on pedal power, during his third year Guerrier approached the late John K. Robinson, M.D., who was associate dean for student affairs.

“He was a great guy, with his white shirt, blue pants, and bow tie,” Guerrier reminisces. “I remember him well. Dr. Robinson called up Palm Bank, they gave me an $800 loan, and I got a car. A used Toyota Corolla.

That’s why I always give to the John K. Robinson Fund,” Guerrier continues. “No matter how bad you were feeling, whenever you saw Dr. Robinson, you had to smile. He’s a legend.”

Guerrier found surgery, delivering babies, and interacting with patients gratifying. Family medicine offered the best of all worlds, so he gravitated in that direction.

While on a medical mission in Haiti last year, Guerrier examined a skinny 16-year-old boy who tired easily and had a rapid heartbeat. The physician had a hunch the child had a hole in his heart, which proved correct. Guerrier arranged for the boy and his mother to get medical visas for a trip to St. Petersburg. He also took care of their travel and accommodations for two journeys to St. Petersburg, where the boy has twice undergone heart surgery. Characteristically, Guerrier downplays his involvement.

“You’re put on this earth for a reason—occupying space is not an option,” he says. “You’ve got to do something, and you’ve always got to do it from the bottom of your heart, expecting nothing.”

As I’m sure most of you have heard by now, last March the University of Miami launched UHealth, South Florida’s only comprehensive network of university-based medical entities. UHealth consists of University of Miami Hospital, a 560-bed, all-private-room, acute-care hospital acquired by the University in December, and two other hospitals—Synergen Comprehensive Cancer Center and Bascom Palmer Eye Institute. Additionally, there are three major UHealth affiliated institutions—Jackson Memorial Hospital, Holtz Children’s Hospital, and Miami VA Medical Center—as well as more than two dozen outpatient facilities.

For medical school alumni, the arrival of UHealth is fantastic news. For one thing, it offers tremendous benefits to your patients who want to participate in clinical research. Not only can they access therapies and drugs not widely available, but they’ll be helping UHealth’s top-notch physicians and scientists make discoveries that benefit patients worldwide.

Scientific research and clinical trials are under way in numerous UHealth departments, such as cardiology, hepatology, and obstetrics and gynecology. Finally, UHealth makes the very latest high-tech medical equipment available to your patients.

As president of the Medical Alumni Association, I invite you to work closely with UHealth whenever possible.

— Gerardo M. Perez, M.D. ’81
Patricia Byers ’80, Named State Trauma Medical Director

Aims to Improve Prevention Efforts

The Miller School gained a second highly placed alum within the Florida Department of Health (FDH) when Patricia Byers, M.D. ’80, was named state trauma medical director. The announcement was made in February by Ana M. Viamonte Ros, B.S. ’79, M.D. ’83, M.P.H, who was appointed FDH’s secretary, as well as Florida’s first surgeon general, last year.

Byers works with Florida’s 21 trauma centers on matters such as delivery of patients to the nearest trauma center and integrated rescue and pre-hospital care.

“My first goal is to get Florida’s trauma registry up to what it should be, so that we can monitor quality more effectively,” says Byers, who remains a professor of surgery and clinical educator at the Miller School’s DeWitt Daughtry Family Department of Surgery in the Division of Trauma, Critical Care and Burns.

The trauma registry collects data on the types of injuries and outcomes recorded within the state’s trauma center network. Byers is also working hard to address shortages of certain types of trauma physicians, especially neurosurgeons, and is pushing to have telemedicine play an active role within the state’s trauma network.

“I’m working to improve trauma prevention efforts statewide,” says Byers, who chairs the Florida Committee on Trauma, which is affiliated with the American College of Surgeons. “The most economical way to treat trauma injuries is to prevent them in the first place.”

Byers has been dealing with doctor shortages in specialties that significantly impact the delivery of first-rate trauma care.

“Increasing numbers of neurosurgeons don’t want to do trauma,” Byers relates. “Not only do they have to stay up late at night, but they’re wary of malpractice suits.”

On the technical side, Byers is working to create a trauma telemedicine system that would allow trauma physicians across Florida to swiftly disseminate the latest developments affecting their field.

After getting her M.D. degree from UM in 1980, Byers completed her internship, residency, and chief residency in general surgery at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

She is married and has two sons who are attending college.

Aims to Improve Prevention Efforts

Patricia Byers, M.D. ’80

The Poet’s Corner

By Bernard S. Bordman, M.D. ’62

Part I: The Storm

On nights, black nights, when the heavens roar

Like mighty breakers on a windswept shore,

I often think of my life as this,

A tumult of fury in an obscure abyss.

The rumble of thunder after a stab of light

Then blackness again, the cloak of night:

I see it again as a thought I knew

As strange as the quest I now pursue.

The drumming of raindrops, rhythm and rhyme,

As constant and endless as the passage of time;

A chain of thoughts and reason dawned,

The mist that hides the mist beyond.

Part II: The Thought

Night and day, light and dark appear before your eyes

The lightning lets you see what’s there and dark is its disguise.

A thought will come and wake you Revealing time and space,

Then into darkness it will flee, and you begin your chase.

Think and ponder, weigh and feel; cudgel thoughts into your head

And soon you catch that one fine thought, its cloak of darkness shed.

But then another one appears more startling than the first

And it, too; feets and you must if you would quench your thirst.

And on and on in ceaseless flight through the mystic halls of wonder,

A foaming wave on a beach of thought, and you are carried under.

Whirling in the mists of time, thoughts become a swarm.

Reaching, grasping, on your search, fast in the THUNDERSTORM.

Bernard S. Bordman, M.D. ’62, practiced general surgery in small towns in Colorado, South Carolina, and New Mexico after leaving the University of Miami. He also ran a small computer business for five years after retiring from medicine. Bordman currently lives in San Antonio, Texas, where he’s in close proximity to his children and grandchildren.

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1970s
Arthur L. Diskin, M.D. ’79, has been appointed vice president, chief medical officer for Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. He will be responsible for the operations of 34 shipboard infirmaries around the world, the on-board care of more than 10,000 employees, and all corporate public health issues. Diskin was previously chief and medical director of emergency services at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

1980s
Richard C. Lehman, M.D. ’80, is a St. Louis orthopaedic surgeon specializing in sports medicine. Lehman is a member of the NHL’s Board of Governors and one of the team physicians for the Florida Panthers. He played tennis at the University of Minnesota in the 1970s, earning academic All-American honors.

1990s
Jason Goldman, M.D. ’98, is a solo practitioner in internal medicine in Coral Springs, Florida. He was recently appointed chair of membership for the Florida Chapter of the American College of Physicians. Goldman and his wife, Joy Goldman, had a second child, Ryan Alexander Goldman, last May.

Maxine Minto, M.D. ’92, was recently named medical director of the National Deaf Academy (NDA), in Mount Dora, Florida. Minto has been with NDA for more than four years and previously held the title of associate medical director. She completed her residency in general psychiatry at the University of Miami/Jackson Memorial Medical Center, along with a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry. Formerly the medical director of the Ocseda County Mental Health Center, Minto began taking sign language classes in 2004 and communicates with NDA residents and staff in American Sign Language.

John Suh, M.D. ’90, is chairman of radiation oncology at Cleveland Clinic Taussig Cancer Institute. Suh is also associate director of the Gamma Knife Center.

2000s
Christina M. Shaw, M.D. ’03, recently completed five years of medical residency at Tufts Medical Center in Boston. During a ceremony at Tufts, Shaw was presented with the Chairman’s Award, which is given by Tufts faculty for superior clinical performance. Shaw also received the Detreling Memorial Award for displaying the best bedside manner to patients.

In Memoriam
James M. Johnson, M.D. ’66, of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, passed away in August. A Navy veteran, Johnson did his residency at Good Samaritan Medical Center and was in family practice for 40 years in North Palm Beach. He served as chief of staff at Palm Beach Gardens Medical Center from 1978 to 1981 and played an instrumental role in establishing that facility’s heart program.

Marion Bartley Knight, M.D. ’62, of Athens, Tennessee, passed away in May at the age of 73. A graduate of Emory University as well as the University of Miami medical school, Bartley was an Obst/Gyn physician in Perry, Florida, as well as Panama City, Florida. Survivors include his wife, Addia Guthrie Knight of Athens, Tennessee; son and daughter-in-law, Dr. Steven B. and Tracy P. Knight of Farragat, Tennessee; daughter and son-in-law, Dr. Lynda and Loring Rogers of Athens, Tennessee; and four grandchildren.

Martin Pepus, M.D. ’60, of Bozeman, Montana, passed away from brain cancer in April. Born in New York City, at age 14 he moved with his family to Miami. Pepus was a captain in the U.S. Air Force, serving as general medical officer in Ogden, Utah. He was a pathologist for 28 years and served as president of Volusia Pathology Group in Daytona Beach. While in Daytona Beach, Pepus started a preschool for mentally handicapped children.

Frank P. Ursa, M.D. ’62, died in Naples, Florida, in May at the age of 73. A 1957 graduate of the University of Tampa, Ursa gave more than $3 million to the University of Tampa and had a dormitory at the school named after him. Ursa had been a director of pathology and clinical laboratories at three major hospitals. He had also been a professor of pathology at Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine and Pharmacy.
Surge in Giving for Reunion Class Gift Program

The Miller School of Medicine and the Medical Alumni Association wish to thank the following reunion class leaders and their classmates, on behalf of the students, specialties, and programs that benefited from their largesse:

20th Reunion Class of 1978
25th Reunion Class of 1983
30th Reunion Class of 1988
35th Reunion Class of 1993
40th Reunion Class of 1998
50th Reunion Class of 1968

President Circle donors are listed at the following levels:
Platinum Level $10,000 or more
Gold Level $5,000 - $9,999
Silver Level $2,500 - $4,999
Bronze Level $1,000 - $2,499

*Postage level is recent graduates one to ten years out.

The following honor roll recognizes alumni of the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine who have made a gift to the medical school between June 1, 2007 and May 31, 2008.

Members of the Class of 1998 gather at a reunion during Medical Alumni Weekend last March.

Each year when reunion time rolls around, class leaders urge their cohorts to give generously. Each year, the class leaders encourage alumni to contribute to the school, and this year's reunion class once again rose to the occasion, increasing their annual giving by almost 30 percent. In keeping with that spirit, Dean Emeritus John G. Clarkson, M.D., M.D. `68, made a sizeable pledge to the John K. Robinson Fund.

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