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SETMA Renames SETMA West Clinic

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It seemed that nothing else could go wrong in the summer of 2007. Four SETMA physicians left to form another group and four others moved to other cities. The disruption made some of SETMA's administration think about applying for other jobs. A physician who had joined SETMA in April wondered if he had boarded a sinking ship and some of those who were leaving assured him that he had.

Change is never easy, particularly when that change is associated with discontent and even hard feelings. Therefore, When Mark Wilson called me on a September, Thursday afternoon and asked to come to my home to visit, I was alarmed. I knew how stressful the past four months had been. I could not imagine what I was going to hear, "Could Mark be so tired that he too was going to leave SETMA?" The idea seemed unthinkable but it crossed my mind. Later, my wife told me that she wondered the same thing.

What I heard from Mark that day was a complete shock. Yes, he was going to leave SETMA but not by choice, as he announced to me that he had a terminal illness. As I sat and listened for two hours, it was hard to associate the conversation with reality. It seemed surreal, but it was very real. Few things could have been as heartbreaking to me as this announcement and none of those things which could have exceeded the pain and anguish of Mark's announcement were related to business.

The journey we had begun together over thirteen years before would now take us down a path for which no one is trained. That journey would make us glad for decisions we had made and that we had stood by even when it was not easy. We were glad that we had made provision financially for a partner who would lose his life. It was little comfort to us in our pain, but it made both of us happy for his family. We were glad that we had fashioned a partnership agreement which would insure SETMA's survival no matter who left, including Mark or me. Little did we know that the beneficiary of these decisions would be Mark.

Our journey carried us to heights and depths. We laughed; we cried; we rejoiced and we lamented. We struggled and we disagreed but in it all the bond which had enabled us to surmount every obstacle, sustained us. That bond was a personal affection, a common commitment and a shared vision and passion.

Only two things hurt Mark in this journey. His deepest hurt and the thing which caused him to weep the most was the thought of leaving his children. They gave him the greatest joy in his life; he loved them deeply. When he talked of them, his eyes and smile reflected his great love. The second great hurt came when a Houston specialist told him that he had to give up the practice of Medicine. From a very young age, Mark had wanted to be a physician. He had

worked and sacrificed to achieve that goal. The thought of not being a physician was loathsome to him.

I remember the day that we talked about this. I told him that his office was there and would always be so. His malpractice was paid and his staff was in place. Any time he wanted to see patients, he could. He never had to stop being a doctor, even when he could no longer attend clinic. And, he never did stop being a physician.

Mark never had any illusions about what he faced. Being a physician and a very good one, he knew the reality he faced from the first day that we all went to M. D. Anderson together. I think I shall never know anyone who will complete such a journey as well. Given three months without treatment and nine months with, Mark journeyed for nineteen months from the day of his diagnosis. Increasingly, he became more peaceful. He learned to say and he learned to enjoy saying, "I love you." Having never been a touch-feely person, he became a hugger and even as it became a struggle, he would rise to his feet and say, "Let me give you a hug."

Pages could be filled with memories of Mark and there are others whose memories are more numerous than mine, but we all would be thankful that though our memories are not as rich as the events which they recall, we are grateful for each one of them.

From time to time, over the eleven weeks since Mark's death, I have visited his grave. Once I told him, that I had visited his "neighborhood" at the cemetery and that while I do not know those who are near him, they all seem to be a good sort. I suspect that he would smile at the idea. Yet, a cemetery plot does not seem like an adequate "touch point" for remembering Doctor Wilson.

As a result, even though a new sign had only recently been placed there and even though other ideas were discussed, SETMA's partners and administration determined that the renaming of SETMA's West End Clinic would be the only fitting memorial to our friend and colleague. The clinic has high visibility and daily thousands of people will have the opportunity to be reminded of this remarkable man.

For Christmas, the year that my father died, my wife gave me a framed, enlarged transparency of a picture of my father. It hangs such that the light illuminates my father's face. As the light changes, the texture of the picture changes. There are times when as I hurry pass, I do not focus upon this picture as I did at first, but still, from time to time, and fairly often, I stop and I remember. I smile and sometimes, I just think. I am happy to have this physical reminder of my father.

As we rush along with our lives, we will pass this sign and will take little note of it, but from time to time, with intentionality, we will stop and see the face and image behind the name.

When we see this sign, we will have a tangible touch point for recalling a very good part of our lives and for recalling one who contributed so richly to that goodness.

We had intended to drape the sign and unveil it at a press conference, but alas the sign

company arrived unannounced last Thursday, June 4, 2009 and replaced the old sign. I think it is beautiful.



No matter what perspective from which you view the sign -- North or South, close or from afar -- it reminds us that Mark never stopped being a physician. He knew what an honor it is to be a doctor of medicine. And, with each patient he saw, he fulfilled the obligation incurred by that honor. Perhaps there are those who knew more and who were smarter, but there were none who cared more or whose commitment to excellence in healthcare exceeded his.

As I move closer and see this sign in more detail, I thank God for Mark Wilson. He was my friend, but of course I am but one, as the "Friends of Mark" were and are legion. I hope that as

Dylan, Zach and Misty, pass this sign, that they will smile and that they will, with all of us, remember.



Good bless you, Mark. Thank you for lending your name to us. You bring us honor in doing

so. James L. Holly, MD

Friend of Mark