

## **James L. Holly, M.D.**

### **Seventh Anniversary Celebration**

**By: James L. Holly, MD**

It was a very dark morning. It wasn't raining and there were no clouds. The sun shown brightly in the sky, but it was a very dark morning. In fact, it was so dark that the hand could not be seen in front of the face.

In May, Cliff Cavett had recommended to Dr. Mark Wilson and Dr. Larry Holly that they along with two other physicians form a group practice. After a number of meetings, drawing up plans and making decisions, it was determined that Southeast Texas Medical Associates, LLP, operating in three different locations and remodeling an office building which would not be ready until March of 1996, would begin operations on August 1, 1995.

It was a very dark morning. It wasn't dark because of any fear or uncertainty. Everyone believed that the development of a true multi-specialty clinic with extensive ancillary services would provide value to patients and the community. It wasn't dark because of any lack of enthusiasm, as everyone was excited.

It was a very dark morning because the lights went out. While Dr. Wilson occupied a small space in an office at 2929 Calder, Dr. Holly continued to practice at 550 North Tenth Street. The darkness came because, except in the waiting room, there were no windows in Dr. Holly's office and the lights went off at 8:00 AM. Living in Beaumont, you know that is not unusual, but in this instance, they didn't come on again until the afternoon. On August 1, 1995, no patients were seen in Dr. Holly's office.

Not a very auspicious beginning for a new enterprise. Though that dark morning may have been the harbinger of darker days, it was not. Quickly, systems began to grow and SETMA took shape. In March of 1996, Dr. Holly moved into our new offices and shortly one of our former partners moved over. Dr. Wilson's office was remodeled and suddenly, we were "altogether."

There have been ups and downs through the past seven years, but progressively we have:

1. Grown in the extent of services provided to our patients. We started with a Moderately Complex Reference Laboratory, which has now grown to the point that the space it occupies has had to be tripled. That laboratory is now integrated with our electronic medical record system so that we can have access to our patients records and laboratory work twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
2. Grown in the number of providers. Starting with four physicians, two of whom have returned to solo practice, SETMA has grown to 16 physicians, 9 Nurse Practitioners and 2 physical therapists. SETMA started with 4 partners, lost two and now has seven physicians committed as partners to the growth and development of a true multispecialty practice. SETMA's 27 providers range from generalist, to specialist, to subspecialists. Organized and operating together, they are able to provide the broadest range of services to SETMA's patients.
3. Improved our communications with our patients. Telephones in medical offices are a constant source of irritation. At SETMA, we often get more than 1500 incoming telephone calls in one day. It has taken time, effort and persistence to identify solutions and to improve telephone services. While no one would say it is perfect, everyone will say it is better. And, our commitment to improving it more is undiminished. SETMA has also added the ability for our patients to communicate with us by e-mail. We even have patients who will take digital pictures of their rashes and e-mail them to us. All of this material is kept in the patient's file electronically. In fact, all incoming telephone calls are documented in the patients chart as to who call, why they called and what the response was.
4. Established national standards of care in SETMA's systems. Whether it is diabetes, congestive heart failure, chronic stable angina or some other disease state, SETMA has undertaken to establish a "best practices" standard of care. By monitoring their own performance and by comparing that performance with their peers, SETMA's providers continue to improve their clinical skills. In fact, SETMA has been asked by the Consortium for Physician Performance Improvement, a coalition of the AMA, Medicare, the National Academy of Medicine and representatives of the specialty societies, to implement the first of three Data Measurement Sets developed by the Consortium for improving Physician performance. In October, SETMA will make a presentation to the Consortium in Chicago as to how we have electronically made it practical to do this.
5. Expanded SETMA's services to nursing homes, hospice, home health, physical therapy, hospital in-patients, mobile x-ray, pulmonary care and other services. This expansion has begun to solve some of the "chronic" problems faced by health care delivery systems, problems such as continuity of care, communication between providers and the controlling of costs while increasing the quality of care.
6. Participated in making managed care available to those who otherwise could not get medical care. Through its participation in an Independent Physician Organization (IPA), the Golden Triangle Physicians Alliance and with a Physician Service Organization (PSO), Select Care of Texas, SETMA has carried the integration of health care delivery to the administrative level. This has provided value to SETMA's patients and to this community.

7. Elected in 1997 to develop an electronic medical records system which quickly turned into an electronic patient management system. This financial investment was criticized by many early on, but now it is the heart and soul of SETMA's patient-care strategies. It has provided the opportunity to have health care providers in the hospital around the clock to take care of SETMA's patients. It has allowed our patients' records to be accessible twenty four hours a day. It has provided the tool through which the search for quality health care has been found.
8. Built a management team which could support and sustain a large, integrated, multispecialty clinic and practice. That management team and all of those who contribute to it provide the structure, stability and strength which allows SETMA's healthcare providers to do all that they do.
9. Created a healthcare delivery system which accomplishes the three goals which every physician is interested in:
  - a. Allows, encourages and supports the providing of excellent care for all patients.
  - b. Gives the health care provider an opportunity to influence his/her future as he/she accepts her/his responsibilities in the face of the new realities we face in medicine today.
  - c. Provides the providers and their team with a stable living for their families in a nurturing and supportive environment.

In doing this, SETMA has grown from an original 23 employees to almost 200. SETMA has three clinical locations and a fourth for central business functions. SETMA has become a reference site for practices and organizations from all over America to come and see what systems can do for health care delivery. Organizations such as Maimonides from Brooklyn, New York with 1500 physicians, Cedar Sinai from Los Angeles, California with 4500 physicians, along with dozens of others have trekked to Southeast Texas to see what SETMA has built. Microsoft Corporation has published a "case study" on the innovative ways in which SETMA has used their products for the improvement of patient care. National medical journals have published articles about SETMA's accomplishment. In August in Rhode Island, in September in Boston, in October in Chicago and in Florida, in November in San Antonio, SETMA's story will continue to be told, as it continues to excite the imagination of others as to what can be done to improve the quality of healthcare.

It is not necessary for others to tell us that we are not perfect. Every day we strive to improve what we are doing. Every day we challenge one another to be better and ultimately to be the best. Every day, we realized that our quest for excellence is that, a quest, a journey, a direction, and not a point at which we ever arrive. And, every day, we renew our commitment to the principles on the basis of which SETMA has operated since that dark day in August of 1995. In May of 1996, those principles were published for all of SETMA's colleagues to read. Through the years, this has been repeated many, many times. In fact, every time we talk about SETMA, we reaffirm these principles. This

formulation of these principles are voiced by the managing partner, others would say them slightly differently, but they mean the same thing nonetheless:

“As a Christian business man, I am very sensitive to maintaining biblical standards in my medical practice. As the managing partner of the largest, private, primary health care group in Southeast Texas, I am careful to make certain that no activity of this partnership violates God’s standards, to the best of my ability. Our corporate documents include prohibitions preventing anyone in this practice from ever performing an abortion, referring a patient for an abortion, or recommending an abortion. We also have prohibitions against beverage alcohol being used in any meeting, gathering, dinner, luncheon, banquet, picnic, or barbecue sponsored by, paid for by or associated with Southeast Texas Medical Associates, LLP.

Southeast Texas Medical Associates, LLP maintains three standards of measuring any decision, all three must be met before we undertake any action. First, we ask the question, ‘Is it legal?’ – this involves ethics. If an action is not legal, we need go no further in our evaluation; we will not do it. But, even if an action is legal, we are not yet at the point of decision; we move to the second step of our evaluation, which applies a higher standard. We ask the question, ‘Is it right?’ – this involves equity, i.e., is it fair to all parties. However, even if a decision is right, this does not get us to a final decision. Before we decide anything, we go one step further and ask the question, ‘Is it righteous,’ – this involves eternity. If it is not righteous, no matter how legal and right an action may be, Christians should not be involved in it. If an action is not ethical, equitable and eternally acceptable, we do not enter into any business agreement. Thus far, God has blessed our practice beyond our comprehension.”

SETMA's commitment to these principles has been tested and challenged. Thus far, we have passed the tests and been vindicated in the challenges. We attribute this to our efforts partially, but ultimately to the blessings of the One Who for reasons beyond our explanation has chosen to bless us.

SETMA has a plaque entitled, "Friends of SETMA." On it are inscribed the names of those who have made a major contribution to SETMA's success. These are those who have cheered for us, chided us, counseled us and consoled us. They are our Friends: Mr. Wayne Reaud, Mr. Mike Ramsey, Mr. Rock Morphis, Mr. G. A. Wimberley and especially, Mrs. Jane Parker. SETMA's success is partially their success. It is the success of SETMA's almost 200 employees. SETMA's success is the blessing of our friends, our colleagues and our God.

We are grateful for that blessing and as we recall the achievements of the past seven years and as we anticipate the accomplishments of the next seven, we acknowledge the One Who has given us this opportunity, The Lord God Almighty.