

Blending Focus, Forward-Thinking and Fun in Family Medicine

Physician Profile: Josette Palmer, MD

Family medicine is challenging. When Glassboro-based family physician Josette Palmer, MD, a solo practitioner, has especially trying days, she focuses on the impact she makes on the lives of her patients.

Like the time a patient visited the office because he had been sick all weekend. Staff suspected the culprit was a stomach bug, but since the patient complained about an uncomfortable feeling in his chest, Dr. Palmer ordered an EKG to check his heart function and activity.

“Lo and behold, the results of the EKG were abnormal. The patient ended up having a stent placed by 10:30 that night. Three weeks later, he showed up at the office’s open house to say thank you,” Dr. Palmer recalls. “That was pretty cool.”

Dr. Palmer has always gone the extra mile for her patients – and her entire life, she has worked relentlessly to tackle life’s challenges head-on. She knew she wanted to care for others from a young age. “I always liked helping people,” she remembers. “Even before high school, possibly when I was as young as 10 or 11, I said I wanted to be a doctor.”

Dr. Palmer’s hard work paid off. She did well in school and attended University of Pennsylvania, followed by Temple University School of Medicine, where she was drawn to pediatrics. As one of a few select residents at Inspira Woodbury (formerly Underwood) Family Medicine Residency Program, she was involved with patients of all ages and earned firsthand experience.

“I still take care of some of my patients from residency; I’ve taken care of them since birth,” she says. When Underwood opened a family health center in Glassboro, Dr. Palmer stayed on and worked there for 17 years. But

after years of providing top-notch care for her patients, the strain of working within a large health system was starting to wear on her. Dr. Palmer began exploring her options and although she found herself working with another health system, she ultimately decided that the large-scale nature and big business aspect of a health system-backed practice concerned her.

“I thought about it; I prayed on it,” she says. That’s when the idea of opening her own, independent practice occurred to her. “I was 47 at the time. I thought, ‘If I don’t do this now, when will I do it?’ Then I thought, ‘Why didn’t you do this in the first place?’”

She found an office in Glassboro and opened her own practice, joined by a reception staff she had worked with on and off since her residency. “I liked having the familiar faces of our receptionists for our patients,” she says. “We joked we were putting the band back together.”

Opening her own practice wasn’t easy, Dr. Palmer admits: “It was a lot of work, different work than what I was used to,” she says. “Now I have to be more conscious of the coding aspect – I have to keep the lights on, make sure the rent is paid.”

Dr. Palmer also works to ensure her practice stays up-to-date, and regularly completes CME courses and attends conferences held by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). “I don’t want to be the doctor who is getting older and not learning anymore,” she says. She adds, “I’ve had some say that I’m doing the opposite of what everyone else is doing, but I’m not everyone else. I’m not like a lot of physicians.”

But the relentlessness with which she runs her practice is work she relishes. “Taking care of people is hard, but important,” she says. “Medicine is not a 9-to-5 job, you never know what the patient on the other side of the door



Dr. Palmer (right) with her husband on vacation, one of the ways she recharges and refreshes.

is dealing with and often, there’s an emotional aspect to it.”

That’s why maintaining a work-life balance has also become one of her priorities.

“Physicians, just like everyone else, need to set boundaries and recognize when they need a break. I try, but I’m not perfect,” she says. “At the end of the day, everyone gets tired.”

To keep herself fresh, Dr. Palmer makes sure to set time aside for herself to live and enjoy the fun things in life – from exercising to massages to travelling.

Maintaining this balance of fun and focus has enabled her to keep providing quality family care for more than two decades. Dr. Palmer has found that the hard work she puts into her practice is all worth it.

“Family medicine may not be as glamorous as some of the other specialties out there, but in the grand scheme of things, we are saving lives,” she says. “We are helping someone manage diabetes; we are doing a routine pap smear and finding cancer; we are finding a mass on a patient. A lot happens through us. This is a career choice that I was chosen for – I love what I do.” ▲