

# OAK LEAF

## WAKE COUNTY MEDICAL SOCIETY

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### From the Desk of Dr. Perry:

Hello, everyone. As we say farewell to 2024, it's time for customary and predictable reflections.

First, let me say that I look forward to the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of my term as president of the Wake County Medical Society. The most recent bylaws revision, led by Secretary-Treasurer **Dr. David Gremillion**, expanded the term of the officers to 2 years rather than the annual churn.

I thoroughly enjoyed the year, and no event was more fun than the annual holiday party at North Ridge Country Club. **Dr. Sharon Foster**, vice president, pulled together an awesome evening featuring the Durham Medical Instruments String Quartet, which included a physician, pharmacist, attorney, and information technologist. It was a very pleasant evening with a full house that featured the full spectrum of careers from medical students and residents to retired physicians. While I enjoy music, I don't proclaim to be able to fully describe what I was hearing. So, I'll naturally turn to Morgan Freeman who responded to hearing a vocal operatic performance in *The Shawshank Redemption*: "I'd like to think they were singing (or playing) about something so beautiful, it can't be expressed in words and makes your heart ache because of it." The musical performance featured a composition by Alexander Borodin, a Russian physician and chemist in honor of his wife for their 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary (and makes me reflect on some of my anniversary offerings). His career in chemistry featured being a

discoverer of the “aldol reaction” and overall expert on aldehydes in addition to being a physician and composer. He evidently led a full life—and I feel fortunate to have encountered his work through the musical presentation with my colleagues in the Wake County Medical Society.

At the celebration, we introduced the 2 newest members of the WCMS executive council: **Persia Hadad**, Physician Assistant in Gastroenterology with Raleigh Medical Group, and **Dr. Sherry Wang**, the WakeMed Internal Medicine Chief Resident and future WakeMed hospitalist. We look forward to collaborating with our newest executive council members to provide society with experiences that enhance our careers and lives. I also thank the full executive council for their participation and contributions throughout the year.

In reflecting on the past year, one notes that we’ve had presentations by Duke faculty, WakeMed faculty, and Campbell faculty in addition to musical presentations and “Santa trolleys” and hikes and picnics. With the assistance and support of **Dr. Sharon Foster** and **Dr. Robert Munt** at the helm of program planning along with the newest council members joining **Dr. Susheel Atree**, **Dr. Karen Bash**, **Dr. David Gremillion**, **Dr. Vinay Saranga**, and **Dr. Ted Kunstling**, I feel confident that the 2025 program lineup will not disappoint. I look forward to sending you a calendar in January that you can incorporate into your already full schedules.

I’ll wrap up by saying that it’s great to see new members along with the established ones within our midst. One can’t help but feel optimistic about our future. It is my hope that we strike the right “chords” in 2025. I feel fortunate to be part of the leadership team of the Wake County Medical Society and look forward to the opportunities “to nurture the bonds between us” in the coming year. Happy New Year!

*John*

## **2024 Secretary-Treasurer Report**

As 2024 ends, the Wake County Medical Society will complete its 121st year of service to our members and Wake County families. We achieved this milestone with a healthy balance sheet but a somewhat diminished membership roster. From a peak of 770 in 2007, our membership has declined to 532, a decline that results partly from demographic and category changes caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic, changes in Health Care delivery

including a high administrative burden, corporatization of medicine, and the aging and retirements of our members, factors that have impacted many organizations.



*David Gremillion MD, Secretary Treasurer WCMS*

We are proud to have added 33 new members in 2024, but we will miss those lost through retirement, illness or death and those whose practices changed in a way that resulted in a new administrative structure that placed a lower priority on County Society membership. These included Health System employed status or those administered by private equity operations. We have 47 Physician Assistant members and 138 Lifetime members and WCMS is enriched by their membership, corporate memory and diverse views.

WCMS leadership has addressed these challenges by careful evaluation and updating of our governing documents. We restated our mission, revised and simplified our bylaws and restated our Articles of Incorporation with the Secretary of State. During the process of these activities our introspection produced new insights into the needs of our membership, how to best respond to them, and how to honor and preserve the best values and traditions of our profession.

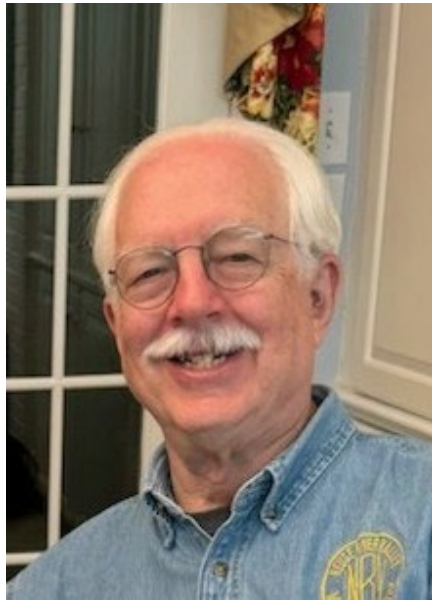
Participation in WCMS social, educational and various outings by members and their families has increased as members discover the value of these in maintaining personal contacts and strengthening understanding at a personal level on topics both medical and non-medical. These activities include WCMS Book Club (meets 5x per year at a member's home), General Membership meetings (4X/year often with educational program and CME), and family-oriented events (picnic in May at the Annie Louise Wilkerson Nature Preserve,

North Carolina Symphony - Summerfest with special seating and perks, and a family-oriented Raleigh Trolley ride through Oakwood hosted by Santa Claus).

Our plans for 2025 are being developed by an experienced and capable Executive Council and Program Committee under the direction of our 112th WCMS President, John ER Perry, III. Members will come and go, and new faces will be welcome but our commitment to our mission of member support will not change and our motto “Nurturing the Bonds between us” will guide our actions.

### **From the Editor**

Our medical education is never truly complete until we personally experience our healthcare system as patients. I have recently experienced brief “CME” as an inpatient, a daunting little refresher and shall share some of my reactions. I hasten to emphasize that I received exceptional care from my doctors, nurses, and other providers for which I am truly thankful.



*Ted Kunstling MD, Past President WCMS, Editor Oak Leaf*

For seniors, the first challenge might be selecting an insurance plan. Offers for Medicare supplements and Medicare Advantage plans arrive every autumn both online and in the mailbox in a volume matched only by political ads and solicitations for donations. Choices are bewildering for many, requiring the assistance of navigators.

Should a Medicare advantage plan be chosen, insistent telephone calls begin urging you to schedule a health evaluation by a nurse at your home for which you will be paid. Whatever their value, these evaluations generate information sometimes used to inflate the complexity of care codes for encounters, reportedly adding billions of dollars to insurers' coffers.

Even when enrolled in a health plan, those without established physician relationships often experience challenges finding a medical home. Scheduling tests and consultations can take weeks before an opening is available. Is this due to high volumes of demand or to decreased efficiency due to electronic medical records documentation and prior authorization requirements? Even though patients are usually spared many prior authorization hassles, medical offices often must hire additional staff to deal with the paperwork. Nevertheless, it is disturbing for patients to receive denial letters because of arbitrary denials or because an appointment has been rescheduled beyond an arbitrary time window.

Out-of-pocket drug costs can be steep and cumulative for chronic conditions. Knowledgeable patients must take their health plan formulary to doctor visits to help determine appropriate medications which are most affordable. Figuring this out can be challenging even with an MD degree. It is virtually impossible for doctors to advise their patients what the costs of treatments or medications might be in today's insurance market.

When interacting with receptionists and other medical personnel, their attention usually seems focused on a computer monitor interposed between them and the patients. All encounters require lots of data entry (often repetitive) and patience. (Happily, most of the doctors I've encountered, even those unaware that I am a retired physician, do focus on their patients rather than their devices, but their after-hours time demands can be exhausting. God bless them!)

In spite of all the emphasis on "customer satisfaction," spending the night in a hospital bed still seems like torture. Beds design seems inspired by the same ideology as speed bumps for "traffic calming" and other features to enhance safety by making one uncomfortable. Do they really help? Physical restraints have fallen out of usage only to be replaced by psychological restraints called bed alarms. Sneak out of bed and a loud alarm sounds quickly attracting the attention of scolding nursing. If one finally manages to drift off, sleep is interrupted about five times nightly for vital signs, blood drawers, medication, etc. Thankfully the pain scorecards with the row of grimacing faces seems to have fallen out of favor in response to the opioid crisis. The best advice for sleep which I received from a seasoned nurse was to take your pain meds before you think you might need them.

Finally, from a patient's perspective, it is surprising how little time your doctors seem to actually spend at your bedside. A caring, comforting and cheerful bedside manner is greatly appreciated by patients. It is a skill that cannot be overemphasized.

## WHAT IS ORGANIZED MEDICINE DOING FOR YOU?

Medical professionals have experienced erosion of autonomy and are increasingly under control of corporate medicine and government bureaucracy. Documentation and bureaucracy intrudes on our professional and personal lives resulting in loss of satisfaction, burnout, and isolation. We are concerned about the wellbeing of both our health care providers and our patients, but we must address more than just personal resilience and workplace cultures. We must consider broader aspects of our healthcare system, factors not under our personal ability to influence. While these concerns might benefit from healthy individual lifestyle habits or conflict resolution sessions, these alone are not sufficient. They must also be addressed at higher systematic, corporate, or governmental levels. However, the vast majority of legislators and executives are not knowledgeable about health care or many other concerns which they must address. Legislators often rely on lobbyists to be educated on matters before them. Lobbyists may not always enjoy a favorable reputation, but they do play a very important role. Doctors can and do write their legislators as individuals, but our profession also needs representation by professionals who know the ins and outs of legislation.

WCMS and other local medical societies play an important role encouraging mutual support and collegiality but lack the resources to be effective lobbyists. This very important role is much better served by state and national medical societies such as NCMS and AMA and, in particular, their political action committees. You might not think you benefit from organized medicine, but who else will stand up for our profession? All deserve your support.

**Wake County Medical Society** focuses on promoting collegial relationships amongst practitioners in our community, building relationships amongst ourselves and with our community. WCMS does not emphasize CME which is widely available through AHEC and many other venues, nor does it lobby state and national governments.

**North Carolina Medical Society** has focused on external priorities at the state level including:

- **Relieving administrative burden** by reforming prior authorization, unifying credentialing processes, and streamlining licensure processes.
- **Improving the practice environment** by obtaining Medicare and Medicaid fee schedule updates, recruiting new practitioners and access, especially in rural and underserved areas, and making improvements in corporate practice of medicine.
- **Support professional growth** by fostering health system environmental changes, recruiting partnerships with practices to participate in leadership development, and continuing to train students to work smarter.

**American Medical Association** supports you on the national level by advocating Medicare payment reform, fixing prior authorization, fighting scope creep, reducing physician burnout, and making technology work for physicians.

The NCMS and AMA have political action committees (PACs), which are essential for educating legislators and their staffs about medical issues as they craft legislation.

There are numerous other societies with different important missions. All require leadership. Learn their missions. How and where can you best serve in 2025? Don't just be a by-stander. Become an advocate. Pitch in!

*Ted Kunstling MD FCCP*

## **DR. BRIAN KESSLER ADDRESSES WCMS ANNUAL MEETING**

**OCTOBER 15, 2024**

Dr. Brian Kessler, Dean of Campbell University Jerry M. Wallace School of Osteopathic Medicine (CUSOM) provided an update of this private institution located only 29 miles south of Raleigh in Buies Creek, NC, which opened its doors to students in 2013. CUSOM's mission is to educate medical professionals to serve the rural and underserved, especially in North Carolina and especially in family medicine.

The number of Osteopathic Medical Schools has grown dramatically over the past decade with 53,000 graduates expected in 2025. CUSOM currently enrolls about 150 students per year drawn from 5,328 applicants. Their average GPA was 3.99 with MCAT scores in the 499-501 range.

Finances are based on a tuition driven model and so student debt is followed carefully. Currently students graduate with debt in the \$300-400,000 range, midway within all osteopathic and allopathic schools. (Dr. Kessler noted that both he and his wife still carry educational debt!) Tuition at some U.S. medical schools can range as high as \$85,000 per year, but it is considerably less than this at Campbell. Many students are veterans and militarily sponsored HPSP students.

This year's graduating class had 100% residency placement with 61% in primary care and 28% in North Carolina. There are continuing concerns about GME slot availability, this being limited by federal funding and number caps. Students receive some of their clinical experience at WakeMed and several WCMS members serve as faculty at the school.



*Dr. Brian Kessler*

## WCMS 2024 HOLIDAY GALA

Wake County Medical Society members and their guests celebrated the conclusion of an eventful year with a Holiday Gala held at the North Ridge Country Club on December 8, 2024.

In keeping with our motto, “To nurture the bonds between us,” guests enjoyed an opportunity to socialize and a buffet dinner before musical entertainment provided by the **Durham Medical Orchestra String Quartet**.

**Vice President Sharon Foster MD** introduced the musicians: **Lisa Forman JD** (violin), **Tingrui Zhao MD** (violin), **Carie Cash Pharm D** (viola), and **Jamie Tyler-Walker, Duke Health IT** (cello).



A highlight was the Third Movement of Alexander Borodin’s 2<sup>nd</sup> String Quartet in D (1891). Dr. Borodin, a Russian physician chemist wrote this beautiful quartet in honor of his wife for their 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, a feat few of us husbands could emulate.

**President John Perry MD** delivered remarks thanking those attending for supporting WCMS over the past year and encouraging their renewal. He also introduced two new additions to the Executive Council, **Persia Hadad PA** and **Sherry Wang MD**.



The meeting was adjourned with best wishes for the holidays and for 2025

*Ted Kunstling MD*

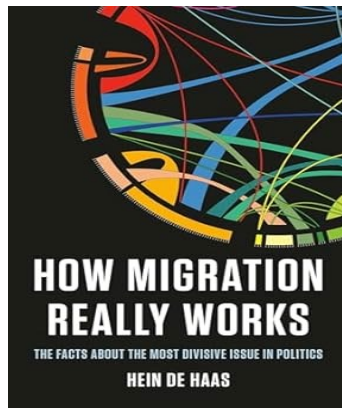


## WCMS BOOK CLUB NEWS

The next meeting of the WCMS Book Club will be held on Wednesday, January 8, 2025, at 6:30 PM.

Politicians and new media have created an atmosphere of crisis around the divisive issue of immigration. Nearly all of us are descended from immigrants and we interact with immigrants and even depend on them every day. Our January book selection offers important information and insights into this very important issue that the noisemakers and media overlook.

Contact [trkunstling@aol.com](mailto:trkunstling@aol.com) if you would like to attend this or future meetings. A light supper will be served. Join our discussion.



**Jan. 8, 2025** (2<sup>nd</sup> Wed due to holiday)- *How Migration Really Works: The Facts About the Most Divisive Issue in Politics* by Hein de Haas.

[Debunking Myths About Migration | Duke Center for International Development](#)

**Mar. 5, 2025-** *The Demon of Unrest: A Saga of Hubris, Heartbreak, and Heroism at the Dawn of the Civil War* by Erik Larson. [How Exactly Did the American Civil War Start? | Columbia Magazine](#)

**May 7, 2025-** *Eruption* started by Michael Crichton and finished by James Patterson. [Book Review: From Crichton and Patterson, 'Eruption' is poised to be seismic publishing event | AP News](#)

## WCMS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL 2024-2025

**President - John Perry, MD** (VP, Medical Education, WakeMed)  
[jperry@wakemed.org](mailto:jperry@wakemed.org)

**Vice President - Sharon Foster, MD** (Pediatrics)

**Secretary Treasurer - David Gremillion, MD** (Infectious Diseases)  
[wcms.treasurer@icloud.com](mailto:wcms.treasurer@icloud.com)

**Past President - Ted Kunstling, MD** (Pulmonary Medicine)  
[trkunstling1@gmail.com](mailto:trkunstling1@gmail.com)

### **At-Large-**

**Robert Munt, MD** (Pediatrics)

**Vinay Saranga, MD** (Psychiatry)

**Karen Bash, MD** (Ob/Gyn; CMO WakeMed North)

**Susheel Atree, MD** (Internal Medicine)

**Sherry Wang, MD** (Chief Resident IM WakeMed)

**Persia Hadad, PA-C**

## CALENDAR

A full schedule of programming is being planned for WCMS in 2025. Watch for announcements in your email and at [www.wakedocs.org](http://www.wakedocs.org).

## SHARE YOUR NEWS

If you have news or information about your practice to share with your colleagues in *Oak Leaf*, please contact [trkunstling@aol.com](mailto:trkunstling@aol.com).