

## WATCHING

# Q & A

Having first opened its doors in 1954, Texas Children's Hospital is still a relatively young institution. So young, in fact, that the very first physician hired to work at the hospital is still practicing in it. In 1953 while the hospital was still under construction, Dr. Edward Singleton was hired as chief of Radiology at Texas Children's and its then-partner, St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital. Fifty-seven years later, he still comes to work five days a week in the department that now bears his name. In this interview, Singleton reflects on his early experiences at Texas Children's, the highlights of his career and what motivates him to continue practicing.



*Dr. Edward Singleton*

### How did you get your job at Texas Children's?

I was a radiology resident at the University of Michigan when I heard from a friend that they were building two new hospitals in Houston, one for children and one for adults, which turned out to be St. Luke's. My wife and I were from this area so I thought, 'Gee, that would be a great job,' and I applied for it. To my great surprise, I got it—right out of residency! I've stayed here so long because I love my work, and I can't think of a better place to do it.

### Chief of service at two hospitals is a lot of responsibility for someone just out of residency. Why do you think you were selected?

When I got the job I thought, 'They must think I'm really something.' In retrospect, back then, very few radiologists wanted to be bothered with children. Pediatric radiology hadn't developed as a recognizable specialty, and it was very difficult to perform studies in children. Long examinations required immobilization, which could be problematic.

Special studies were extremely difficult and prolonged. Technical equipment for rapid exposures and low radiation was not available. X-ray studies of the urinary tract were done by intramuscular injection, which resulted in a lot of pain. There were a lot of factors that made pediatric radiology difficult. When I took the job here, there were only about 12 full-time pediatric radiologists in the entire country.

But I had a real interest in the field. Most radiologists who worked with children at the time also worked with adults. When I started I also did both, but I was finally able to focus exclusively on pediatric radiology when they built a separate hospital for Texas Children's.

### What were your early experiences with The Auxiliary?

When Texas Children's was just getting off the ground, the lovely ladies of the Women's Auxiliary were extremely kind to this department. One of the things I wanted was an electric train for our children's waiting room, and they provided that. Well, that didn't last too long because the children destroyed the train. But The Auxiliary was very helpful to me. I wrote a book, *Radiology of the Elementary Track in Infants and Children*, that I dedicated to them because I was so appreciative of all their help and support.

### Besides its tremendous growth, how has the hospital changed during your career?

The biggest changes have been in the advances in care. Antibiotics are now available for infections, chemotherapeutic drugs for malignancies, safe and sophisticated



*Dr. Edward Singleton had already completed more than a decade of service as chief of Radiology at Texas Children's when this photograph was taken in 1964.*

anesthesia for surgical procedures and life support for premature infants, to mention only a few. Early in my career, many pediatricians didn't want anyone to operate on patients who were younger than three or four years old. Now, operations on the fetus are possible. I had the privilege of witnessing the first heart transplant performed in the United States. Today, we regularly perform transplants on children. In my own specialty, I have seen the introduction of rapid automatic film processing to ultrasound and computerized tomography (cat scans), MRIs and now digital and three-dimensional imaging.

**What do you consider your biggest professional accomplishments?**

I think one is the development of a Radiology Department that is unsurpassed by any that I know of. Individually, I am pleased to have been recognized professionally with the gold medals of six major radiology societies. And I'm extremely proud of the fact that my

medical school, the University of Texas at Galveston, has declared me one of their Legends along with just a few others. Individually, it's been a tremendous career for me.

**What about your career have you found most enjoyable?**

I really just enjoy the actual work. It is wonderful to go to bed every night looking forward to coming here the next morning. It's very special. When I was younger, I liked to play golf, I liked to travel, I liked to hunt and fish. I'm denied doing those things now, but I'm not denied the privilege of coming here and doing the thing I love most. 🍷

— *by* TOBY WEBER