

WATCHING

Q & A

In June, Texas Children's Hospital named Dr. Mark Kline its new physician-in-chief, filling the role previously held by the late, beloved Dr. Ralph D. Feigin. Kline recently sat down with *Watch* to speak about his history with Texas Children's, his groundbreaking efforts in treating pediatric AIDS patients around the world, his vision for the hospital and the relationship he hopes to have with The Auxiliary.

You earned your M.D. from Baylor College of Medicine in 1981. How did you decide on pediatrics as your specialty?

My interest in pediatrics really started in 1978 when I met Dr. Feigin. I was a first-year medical student and he came to lecture our class. That day was the first time I had ever thought of being a pediatrician. I listened to Dr. Feigin lecture and thought, 'Wow, I'd sure like to be like him.' Then, when I did my rotation in pediatrics, I really loved it. It was stimulating intellectually, but it was also really fun being around and working with children.

What are your goals for Texas Children's Hospital as physician-in-chief?

We've got a number of big jobs ahead of us. Recruitment of new faculty is one. We've got the West Campus, the Maternity Center, the Jan and Dan Duncan Neurological Research Institute and the expanded research space at the Feigin Center. It's a major task to find high quality clinical and research faculty to staff all of those operations.

We need to expand our research enterprise in order to drive innovation in pediatric health care. We need the full spectrum of research expertise here at the institution—from basic

science to health services research and everything in between, including translational research and clinical trials. Through research, we will not only improve the quality of the care we deliver locally, we also will transmit that information to other institutions and improve the care of children all over the world. Research gives us the opportunity to impact the lives of literally millions of children all over the globe.

Our training programs are absolutely vital. We have to focus attention on recruiting the very best young students and young doctors to our programs here. These people will become the principal investigators and physician leaders of our future. We have to give them a compelling reason to train with us. We can do that by diversifying our residency program. I would like to develop a residency program in global child health, for example. We're also working on developing a "fast-track" program that allows young doctors who know they want careers in research to get started even as they're doing residency at the hospital.

Along with being named physician-in-chief, you were also appointed chair of the Department of Pediatrics at Baylor College of Medicine.

What's the significance of holding both posts simultaneously?

Baylor has its challenges and Texas Children's has a different set of challenges, but our futures are absolutely linked. My role is to do my best to make sure that both institutions are pulling together 100 percent of the time and that our mission, vision, goals and objectives are in harmony. I think we've done a remarkable job working and growing together

Kline—featured guest speaker at the 2007 Forum Series educational luncheon—addresses the crowd while Jeff Richardson of the Abbott Fund, John Damonti of Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, Mark A. Wallace and Dr. Ralph D. Feigin look on.



so far. But it's very important to protect that relationship as we move into our future.

On July 9, KPRC-Channel 2 presented you with a Jefferson Award for Public Service for your work with Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative at Texas Children's Hospital (BIPAI). Could you tell us a little more about the award and what it means to you?

The Jefferson Awards are special because they recognize volunteerism and community service at both a local and a national level. A local panel of judges selects winners from more than 150 communities across the nation, and from this pool five are selected annually to receive the Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis Award for Outstanding Community Service Benefiting Local Communities. The national award is

Dr. Mark Kline started the Baylor International Pediatric AIDS Initiative (BIPAI) at Texas Children's Hospital to treat underprivileged children with HIV/AIDS. BIPAI treats more than 30,000 children with HIV across Africa and in Romania.

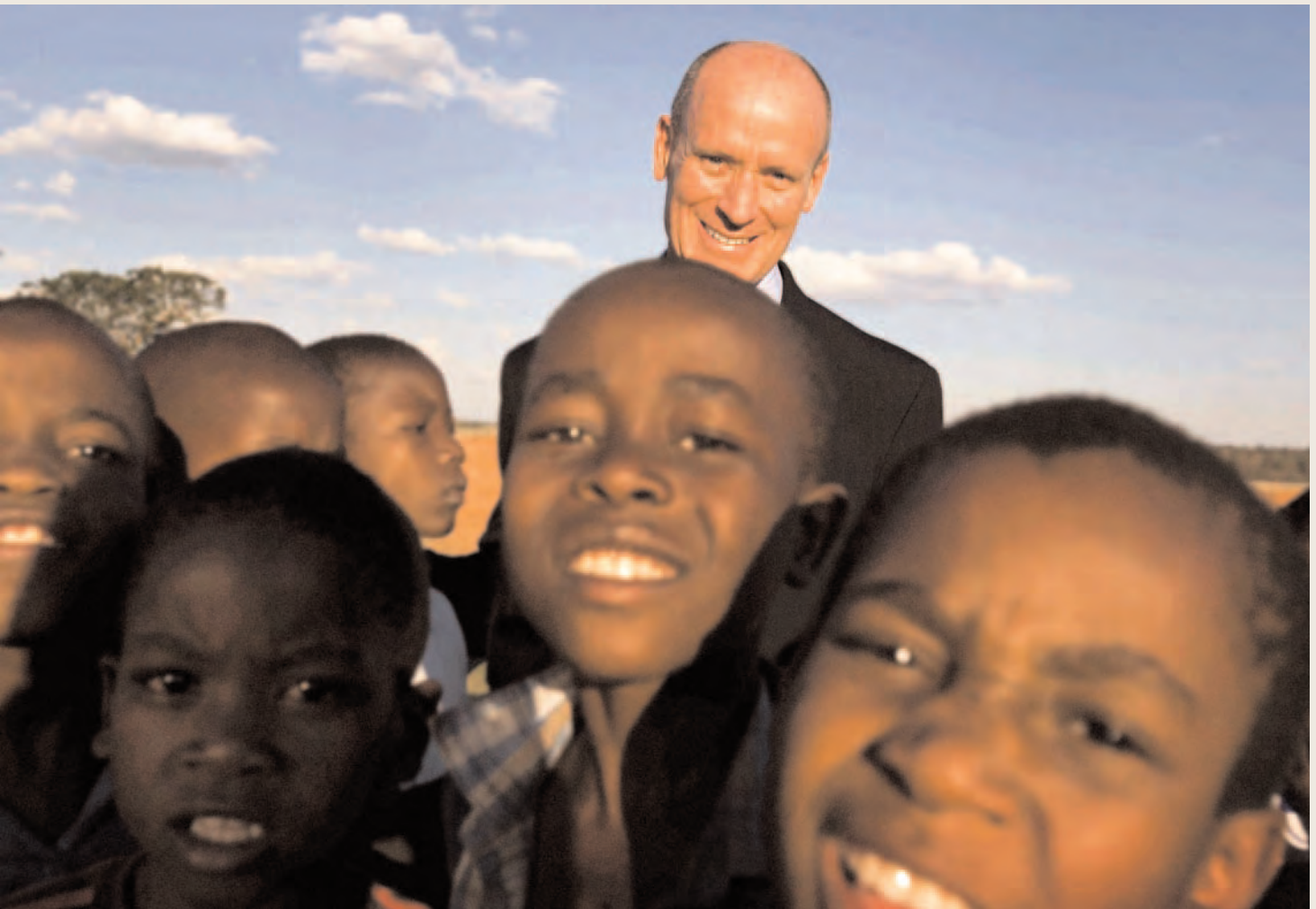


Photo by Smiley N. Pool

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On July 9, KPRC-Channel 2 news anchor Jerome Gray (left) presented Dr. Mark Kline with a Jefferson Award for Public Service during the evening news.

certainly very prestigious and I would be elated to make it to that level, but the local award is just as meaningful to me because it really celebrates grassroots, community activism and serves as a call to action to get involved. That's something I really believe in.

This award is a testament to what BIPAI is accomplishing as an organization. I was honored to accept it, but I did so on behalf of the entire BIPAI team. It's the local directors, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, students and others who are out there working in the trenches day in and day out. This is well-deserved recognition for them, and I hope it inspires others to get involved or donate resources.

What inspired you to get involved in global outreach for children with HIV/AIDS?

In the early days of pediatric HIV/AIDS, I was heavily involved in the development of antiretroviral medications for children. By the mid-1990s, the drugs that we had developed for HIV had become very powerful and effective. Basically, the medicine transformed HIV from a certain death sentence into a chronically manageable disease. Children with HIV were living nearly normal, healthy lives, and we were thrilled that we had found a way to "defeat" AIDS. Then, I made a trip to Romania in 1996, and I saw hundreds of HIV-infected children who had no access to the medications and treatment that were saving lives of



Kline rounds with residents in 1999. Kline's top priorities as physician-in-chief and chair of pediatrics include enhancing the training program and recruiting the best young physicians and students to the program.

patients in the United States. It was the first time I had seen with my own eyes how different life is for children living with serious disease in the poor countries of the world. I knew I had to do something to help.

BIPAI started as a small, low-budget "passion" project. How did it become one of the largest and most successful programs of its kind?

BIPAI's model actually is very simple. To have the transformative impact we desired, we had to institute a program of highly active antiretroviral therapy. That is what really transformed HIV in the United States. So, we renovated an old orphanage in Romania and opened it as a Center of Excellence for children with HIV/AIDS. We approached several pharmaceutical companies and asked them to donate medicine, which they did. That was in November of 2001. By April 2002, we had begun about 430 Romanian children on highly active antiretroviral therapy. We saw a 90 percent reduction in hospitalizations, and the death rate of these children fell from 15 percent per year to one percent per year.

That was a remarkable outcome, and we wanted to replicate it. So, in partnership with the government of Botswana, we started a similar program in southern Africa. From there we have replicated this Children's Center of Excellence model in a number of settings across Africa. All of our centers are networked with one another, so the staff can learn from each other and duplicate best practices. We currently have about 30,000 children in treatment for HIV across Africa and in Romania.

Dr. Feigin had a very close relationship with The Auxiliary. How do you see yourself working with the group?

I know that Dr. Feigin was well loved by The Auxiliary, so I've got some awfully big shoes to fill. I can tell you this: I am 100 percent committed to The Auxiliary. I think there is no better expression of community support than the commitment they've shown to Texas Children's Hospital over the years. The hundreds of thousands of volunteer hours they've given, the financial support they provide and, most importantly, the way they touch the lives of the patients, families and caregivers are phenomenal. I want to show them how much we appreciate them, keep them in the loop about what I'm doing, get their input and ideas on a regular basis and work together to find new and better ways to support the hospital.

Dr. Feigin taught me a lot over the years, especially about the importance of having good friends in your corner. I'm very excited about building a strong and lasting friendship with The Auxiliary. I've enjoyed their support ever since the earliest stages of my career. They funded my postdoctoral fellowship in Pediatric Infectious Diseases and have been supportive of everything I've done since then. I'm looking forward to taking that relationship to the next level in my new role as physician-in-chief. 🍷

— *by* EDEN KERR-PERKINSON