

Barry Moak: 'I always wanted to be a doctor'

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Barry Moak has been a family physician in private medical practice in Abilene since 1986. He is a member of First Baptist Church in Abilene. From deep in the heart of one Texan, he shares his background and thoughts on being a follower of Christ in health care. To suggest a Texas Baptist leader in health care to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

Where else have you served in health care, and what were your positions there?

I have served on the faculty of two family practice residency programs in Abilene. Both since have closed. I have been on the medical staff at Hendrick Medical Center since 1986 and served as chief of the family practice section and vice chairman of the department of medicine. I currently oversee two nurses providing health care in the Nolan and Scurry County jails.

In the past, I supervised physician assistants in rural health clinics in Merkel and Clyde. I have accompanied John Moore, missions pastor at First Baptist Church of Abilene, to Aldama, Mexico, to work in the Gloria al Padre Clinic there and to Skopje, Macedonia—now known as North Macedonia—to assist with health care in a kindergarten operated through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship.

I joyfully serve from time to time as camp doctor for Paisano Baptist

Encampment.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in many cities and towns in Mississippi and across Texas. I was born in Midland and moved back there in 9th grade and graduated from Midland High School. I also attended schools in Luling, Bryan, College Station, Giddings and Uvalde.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

There were many influences in my coming to know the Lord. I was a Baptist long before I was a Christian. My parents and grandparents were Christians, and I was at church every time the doors opened. So, there were many pastors, youth ministers, music ministers and lay workers who shared the love of Christ with me.

My parents were the greatest influence. Along with my brother, I would climb onto my parents' bed every night to read the Bible and pray. On one of those nights, when I was 9 years old, I asked the Lord to forgive me, save me and lead me.

Where were you educated, and what degrees did you receive?

I have a Bachelor of Science degree in zoology from Texas A&M University (1978) and a Doctor of Medicine degree from the University of Texas Medical School at San Antonio.

I completed a residency in family practice at Hendrick Medical Center in Abilene in 1986 and became a diplomate of the American Board of Family Practice that same year. I became a fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians in 1996.

About life in health care

Why do you feel called into health care?

I always wanted to be a doctor, for as long as I can remember. When I was 12 years old, I “surrendered” for special service at Highland Lakes Baptist Encampment, thinking I would become a medical missionary.

With guidance, counseling and prayer with and from pastors, professors and my Baptist Student Union director, I came to understand my calling was to be a Christian physician in my community.

How does being a Christian influence your decisions in health care?

It’s almost cliché now and no longer in vogue; the bracelets are gone, but before they ever were a thing, I tried always to ask, “What would Jesus do?”

I don’t have a written code, although on the day of medical school graduation I did swear to the Hippocratic oath, but I try always to do what I believe is consistent with the person and teachings of Christ.

What is your favorite aspect of health care? Why?

For me as a family doctor, my favorite aspect of health care is the relationships. For 20 years, I delivered babies. I sleep at night now! I still have children in my practice, as well as nonagenarians. I care for five generations of one family.

What one aspect of health care gives you the greatest joy?

My greatest joy is to see someone’s hope in life restored, whether it be from an improvement in their own health or that of a family member,

learning a test result was not the bad news they feared, or even being with them with genuine respect and dignity at the passing of a loved one.

What one aspect of health care would you like to change?

I hate insurance. I hate fighting with insurance companies to get medication or therapies or tests my patients really need, but that the insurance company says is not covered or essential. I'd like to see insurance companies go away.

What did you learn on the job you wish you learned elsewhere?

The "business" of medicine. I was completely unprepared to hire, manage and sometimes fire employees; to manage payroll and employment taxes; and to negotiate contracts.

What is the impact of health care on your family?

My wife said early on she did not want people to see our children coming and say, "Oh no, here come that doctor's kids." I was able to provide consistently for them financially, and I believe my kids took some pride when people told them I made a difference in their lives. I believe my family always knew if I had to be away from them, it was for something important.

How do you expect health care to change in the next 10 to 20 years?

In the next 10 to 20 years, I expect the United States finally to realize we, as a nation, do not really do a good job of delivering health care to the least among us. I hope and pray younger physicians, who still are idealistic, will seek a way to make health care available to all without regard to gender, race, sexual orientation or ability to pay.

Name the three most significant challenges and/or influences facing your place in health care.

The most significant challenges facing my place in health care—and not in any order—are: (1) ever escalating costs, (2) electronic medical records, which are of the devil and make liars of many physicians, and (3) the pressure to see more and more patients for less and less reimbursement.

What do you wish more people knew about health care?

I wish more people knew their health insurance company does not exist to pay for their medical care, but rather, they exist to pay dividends to their stockholders.

If you could get one “do over” in health care, what would it be, and why?

I accepted an offer to stay in Abilene after residency that was based greatly on financial factors. We have loved Abilene, and Abilene has loved us. It was a great place to work and rear our children. But perhaps if I were able to choose again, I might choose the road to that small Texas town I dreamed of during residency.

About Barry

Why are you Baptist?

As I am sure is the case for many *Baptist Standard* readers, I grew up in a Baptist church, and it's what I know best.

When asked what he would be if not Baptist, my high school pastor said, “Ashamed!” I have, however, genuinely considered why I still am a Baptist, and I believe my church teaches the Bible and has taught me to interpret

Scripture in the light of the life of Jesus Christ.

Who were/are your mentors, and how did/do they influence you?

My most significant mentor recently passed away. B.J. Estes was one of the founders of the Hendrick Family Practice Residency Program. He was a family doctor who put in countless hours, but did so with a smile and an encouraging word for everyone he encountered, even at 3 a.m. By his words and example, he taught me to be a family physician.

Perhaps my greatest spiritual mentor was Roger Matkin, Baptist Student Union director at University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. The Bible studies—with food—at his and Melva's house gave me insight into Scripture I never had before and a desire to know more than just the words.

Other than the Bible, name some of your favorite books or authors, and explain why.

I love John Grisham. I have read and collected every book he has written. Perhaps after *The Firm* was made into a movie and I chose to see if the book was better—as they often are—it was his Mississippi roots that attracted me.

I love reading about things I know nothing about. I also love Anne Perry mysteries, and I will read almost any historical fiction or biography.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

I love I John 3:16, because it is the inspiration to keep going and doing what I do. I also love Psalm 46:10, because it's the verse my grandmother shared with me in a time of uncertainty and pointless exertion. It now keeps me grounded.

Name something about you that would surprise people who know you.

In elementary school and junior high, I wanted to be in the Longhorn band.

What would you have done if you hadn't gotten into medical school?

I probably would have gone to seminary and become either a preacher or, more likely, a Bible professor.