

Tresa and Mike McNeal: Serving in healthcare as a couple

June 30, 2020

Tresa and Mike McNeal, members of First Baptist Church in Temple, are internal medicine physicians with Baylor Scott & White Hospital in Temple. Tresa is a hospitalist, and Mike provides a mixture of inpatient and outpatient primary care.

At First Baptist in Temple, they are young adult life group leaders with their good friends, Bert and Marcia Pope. Mike is a deacon, and both have served their church in various capacities.

From deep in the hearts of two Texans, they share their background and thoughts on being a follower of Christ in healthcare. To suggest a Texas Baptist leader in the marketplace to be featured in this column, or to apply to be featured yourself, [click here](#).

Background

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

Tresa:

- Hospitalist physician from 2006 to 2010

At Baylor Scott & White Hospital in Temple:

- Associate program director for the Internal Medicine Residency Program

from 2010 to 2014

- Division director of inpatient medicine—the leader of a hospitalist group—from 2014 to 2019
- Vice chair of inpatient operations of the Department of Medicine from November 2019 to April 2020
- Interim chair of the Department of Medicine from April 2020 to present
- Scott & White Clinic Board of Directors from December 2017 to present
- Baylor Scott & White Board of Governors from 2018 to present

Mike:

- Chief resident for internal medicine from 2013-14

At Baylor Scott & White Hospital in Temple:

- Outpatient and inpatient internal medicine physician for the Center for Diagnostic Medicine from 2014 to 2017
- Internal medicine clerkship director for the Texas A&M College of Medicine and Baylor Scott & White in Temple, from 2015 to 2018
- Division director of general internal medicine from 2017 to present

Where did you grow up?

We both grew up in Sanger, Texas, and attended First Baptist Church in Sanger, where Mike's dad Skip McNeal came to be the pastor in 1980. Mike was age 7, and Tresa was age 5 at the time. Tresa's mom, the late Sherry Muir, was the organist, and her dad Richard Muir was a deacon and faithful choir member.

How did you come to faith in Christ?

Tresa: Having grown up learning about Jesus and being in a family that loved Jesus, I came to understand choosing to follow him was a personal decision. I strongly understood there was nothing I could do to be good enough.

One Sunday morning in an act of bravery compelled by being terribly aware of my own need, I walked forward during the invitation at the age of 7 to let everyone know I needed Jesus and wanted to become a Christian. This was all to the surprise of my parents, who were in their usual stations in the choir and at the organ. I'm sure there were a few missed notes as my mom wondered what in the world I was up to.

Mike: I was born on a Sunday and in church the next Sunday. Growing up in a pastor's home, I was influenced by some wonderful Sunday school teachers and other church members.

I also came to know church attendance was not what mattered. My coming to know the Lord was a process that culminated in my older brother Mark witnessing to me. I was 6-years-old at the time, and he was 11.

God uses all of where we are, and we are responsible for influencing those we are around.

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

Tresa:

- University of North Texas, Bachelor of Arts in speech and hearing science, 1996
- Texas A&M College of Medicine, MD, 2002
- Scott & White combined internal medicine and pediatrics residency in Temple, 2006

Mike:

- University of North Texas, Bachelor of Arts in computer science, 1996
- University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Master of Science in information systems, 2010

- Texas A&M College of Medicine, MD, 2010
- Scott & White internal medicine residency in Temple, 2013

About life in healthcare

Why do you feel called into healthcare?

We both feel the only way we have been able to pursue training and a career in medicine is because this is where God has led us.

We had different journeys getting to this place, and we are grateful for the opportunity to serve our patients, communities and colleagues where we are. We feel strongly God calls and equips people for all different kinds of work, and we just happen to be in healthcare.

We enjoy the privilege of interacting with all types of patients from different walks of life with different degrees of need. Being in healthcare also allows us to be involved in critical and important times in peoples' lives. It also gives us an opportunity to serve our communities outside of healthcare in a unique way.

How does being a Christian influence your decisions in healthcare?

When you know who the real Physician is, it makes all the difference in your decisions and conversations. We often prescribe medicines, but many times the most important part of the care we provide is serving others in a Christ-like manner.

We continue to feel compelled to seek excellence in our ongoing training and knowledge needed to do our jobs from a human perspective, but all of this is to honor God. Again, we know he is the source of life, wisdom and healing, be that physical and/or spiritual.

What is your favorite aspect of healthcare? Why?

We both enjoy the complexity and learning found in a healthcare career. We enjoy interacting with people from all walks of life, all walks of faith and with all types of challenges. If God can use us in some small way to make their lives easier and also draw others to him, that is where we find our purpose.

What one aspect of healthcare gives you the greatest joy?

Our greatest joy is being involved at crucial points in peoples' lives. We are grateful to do meaningful work.

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

Tresa: When I came through medical training, there was less emphasis on effective communication training than there is now in medical education—specifically communication related to difficult end of life situations. I learned a lot of this in my early years as an attending physician where I spent a lot of time as a hospitalist at a long-term acute care facility. Now we have excellent training programs for helping patients and families walk through discussing goals of care and talking about what's important to them as they may face end of life situations.

What is the impact of healthcare on your family?

Our days often start very early, which may create challenges with getting kids to school, etc. God has blessed us through the years with some amazing friends and helpers for our kids after school who have modeled Christ-like lifestyles and decisions for them, as well. We may have worked more weekends and nights than some parents; however, the whole economy now is 24/7, so maybe that's not unique.

How has your place in healthcare or your perspective on healthcare changed?

We both have had the opportunity to lead our groups of outpatient and inpatient colleagues. This changes one's perspective, as you can have an impact on not just your own patients, but also on how care is delivered for other physicians through processes and workflows that promote a good patient experience and outcome.

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

In the next 10 years, there will be a shift toward value-based care rather than fee-for-service. This has already begun and involves the concept of healthcare systems getting paid on how they manage a population of people rather than getting paid for each line item of care that's delivered.

This has broad implications on what healthcare will look like. There will be more of a focus on population health and keeping people well rather than responding to acute illness.

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

1. Everything is different since COVID-19 began. Every decision is harder and riskier for everyone. There sometimes are unanticipated process challenges with all of the changes that have been required in the past weeks.

2. A potential surge of COVID-19 patients constantly looms, although healthcare in general now is more prepared for this than we were in late March in terms of plans for staffing, equipment, bed space, protective equipment, ventilators, etc.

3. Like most of healthcare around the country, we are facing challenges, because patients are not seeking care that they otherwise would seek due to fear of being exposed to COVID-19. We are seeing harm coming to patients who are waiting until the last minute to seek care for cardiac or other emergent conditions, such as abdominal conditions that may need surgery.

What keeps you sane in the midst of the challenges of a pandemic?

For both of us, this would be prayer, perspective—remembering none of this is a surprise to God—and just enough humor to keep the day moving for ourselves and those around us.

We also take daily walks or jogs early in the morning together, which help both of our physical and mental outlooks.

What do you wish more people knew about healthcare?

We hope people will remember doctors and other healthcare professionals are just regular people. We aren't perfect, although we know the intensity of our jobs demands excellence to the limit of our human ability.

About Tresa & Mike

Tell us about your family.

We have three sons: James—a senior in high school who will head to Baylor University in the fall; Jonas—a 14-year-old finishing 8th grade; and John Mark—a 7-year-old finishing first grade.

They have been managing all of their own distance learning and have been real troopers not to complain about things, even though we are gone from the house for pretty long days since all of this started.

Why are you Baptist?

We grew up in a Baptist church. We remain Baptist because we believe in the basic tenets of Baptist faith, such as priesthood of the believer and autonomy of the local church.

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

Our parents obviously had tremendous influence on our lives. Mike's mom Mary taught every kid in Sunday school somewhere along the way. We also each can recall wonderful, committed Sunday school teachers who challenged us to memorize the Bible and seek God for ourselves in order to grow in his truths.

We also learned a lot from various youth ministers. For both of us, David Mills was our youth minister during a very influential time period in our lives and invested a lot in us.

John Pearce was the Baptist Student Ministry director at the University of North Texas when we both came through, and we credit him also with mentoring us and investing time in each of us.

What is your favorite Bible verse or passage? Why?

Tresa: I really like the book of James. It has very practical instructions for daily living and good reminders. I also really like Romans 12:1-2. It reminds us our lives are a living sacrifice given back to God.

Mike: I really like the book of John. I like the way he tells the story of Jesus and the perspective he brings.

Name something about you that would surprise people

who don't know you.

Along with others, we are founding board members and supporters of [TAMRA Learning Academy](#), which is a nonprofit school in Temple, created to educate students with learning differences by promoting academic and social development enhanced by biblical teaching.