



# A Doctor's Story

Matthew P. Owens, MD

Dr. Matthew Owens has been providing quality care to residents of central South Dakota at the Redfield Clinic since the spring of 1999. However, Dr. Owens' role in the community is not simply relegated to his practice alone. He is an active member of his local church, heading up the men's group and serving as a trustee. He is a member of the Spink County Local Emergency Planning Committee and serves as medical director for the county's emergency medical services. Dr. Owens also has an appointment as a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Family Medicine at Sanford School of Medicine of The University of South Dakota.

And although he is proud to serve Redfield, the surrounding area and the medical school in these capacities, Dr. Owens' involvement in helping establish the foundation for a collaborative on disaster preparedness in South Dakota ranks near the top of his long list of achievements. He has played an active role in the collaboration, which is comprised of the South Dakota Department of Health (SDDOH), the SDSMA and the Sanford School of Medicine, by participating as a Lead Physician, orchestrating statewide disaster-preparedness efforts and an emergency response network. The concept was formed following 9/11 to better prepare South Dakota physicians for responding to natural, chemical and biological emergencies. As a result, Lead Physicians were identified and asked to assist the SDDOH in carrying out training and preparedness exercises, as well as being available as needed for emergencies. "Being in this group is one of the most gratifying experiences of my career," Dr. Owens says. "To my knowledge, South Dakota is the only state with this level of organization regarding these matters of importance."

Along with his involvement in this collaboration, Dr. Owens has been active in the AMA since 1997, and he currently serves on the SDSMA's Committee on Medical Practice and recently fulfilled a term for the SDSMA's Commission on Medical Education.

Dr. Owens is a native of Sioux City, Iowa, and he attributes his choice to becoming a physician to his parents, who were and continue to be strong advocates for people with developmental disabilities. His father, a semi-retired professor at Morningside College, was instrumental in establishing a master's program in special education at the college, and his mother was heavily involved in the school district's special-education services. Seeing the positive impact his parents had on the lives of so many people inspired his decision to become a doctor.

However, his parent's influence didn't lead him directly into his current medical career. After high school, Dr. Owens became a medic in the U.S. Army Reserve in the 1980s and

also became a certified EMT. After the Army, he received his undergrad in English and then his master's degree in biology from the University of South Dakota. During this time he also developed his skills as an athletic trainer. From there, Dr. Owens went on to finish medical school at the University of South Dakota School of Medicine and decided to complete his residency in Brookings through the Rural Training Track, a short-lived program specifically designed to develop residents into licensed doctors that would someday provide services to medically underserved areas.

And in talking with Dr. Owens, it becomes readily apparent that he truly loves practicing in Redfield. "One of the most enjoyable aspects of my job is seeing multiple generations of families coming through my door each day," he says. "A significant number of my patients are multi-generational, and applying evidence-based medicine to two or three generations really grants me the opportunity to witness the positive outcomes of being a physician."

But practicing in rural South Dakota is not without its difficulties. Acting as an advocate for the patient is a basic tenet of Dr. Owens' philosophy, but advocating for the quality care of his patients is sometimes hampered by the distance they sometimes must travel to receive further treatment. "If a patient needs to go to Aberdeen, Sioux Falls or wherever, part of it is making sure they get to see the doctor they need to see in a timely, cost-effective manner," he says. "This aspect of care – access – is crucial to rural communities, because if time and cost become too much of a concern, some of these folks might not go back to a doctor."

When he's not at the office, Dr. Owens enjoys spending time with his wife, Wendi, and their three children: Kyle, 14; Hanna, 6; and Olivia, 4. He loves watching his son participate in sporting activities, and he has a true passion for the outdoors, which is accented by his knowledge of hunting and training gun dogs, particularly Deutsch Drahthaars (German Wirehairs) and Munsterlanders. Again, this passion stems from his father, who operates a registered Munsterlander kennel in Sioux City. "You ought to see what's possible when a guy with a doctorate in education trains a dog," he laughs.

Dr. Owens plans to someday retire in Redfield, and when hunting season is over, he might make the "occasional trip south and be a snowbird once in a while."

*"A Doctor's Story" is a monthly feature that highlights doctors throughout South Dakota who are contributing to the quality of health care and the overall good of the community. The goal of this feature is to connect the faces and work of these doctors with the South Dakota State Medical Association (SDSMA).*