

## Championing 'health for all'

Photo by John Reilly Photography



PETER B. AJLUNI, DO

**D**uring his powerful speech before the World Health Organization's World Health Assembly in Geneva in May, the Rev Desmond Tutu spoke of the strong connection between faith and health. "The WHO and the World Council of Churches share a common mission to the world—protecting and restoring body, mind and spirit," noted the archbishop emeritus of Cape Town, South Africa.

"You are the guardians of the dream of health for all," he continued. "You have the opportunity and responsibility to lead the world to a healthy place. You are the enactors of justice: justice in the distribution of a country's wealth for health, ... justice to save the lives of your people and enable them to prosper and build healthy nations."

The words and legacy of this hero, who received the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize for his tireless efforts to end apartheid nonviolently, remind me of the philosophy and accomplishments of our profession's noble founder. Andrew Taylor Still, MD, DO, who appreciated the interrelationship of mind, body and spirit, who understood the body's

innate ability to heal itself, envisioned a less invasive, more effective system of medicine in which physicians would treat the whole patient, taking into account the environmental and political, as well as the bio-psycho-social, variables that affect health.

Today, the Rev Tutu devotes most of his time, passion and ecclesiastical influence to the campaign against human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome in Africa. By any measure, he is a great pioneer, as was A.T. Still.

### Lasting impact

This month's issue of *The DO* celebrates dozens of Great Pioneers of Osteopathic Medicine, who are being honored in July during the AOA House of Delegates' meeting in Chicago. Listed on Pages 24-43, these innovators and rebels, thinkers and activists, leaders and humanitarians all have made a huge impact on osteopathic medicine in the past several decades, propelling the profession to where it is today.

Many of the remarkable men and women being recognized are personal heroes of mine. The number of "firsts" they represent is testament to how far we've come. Individually and collectively, they have made a dramatic difference on patient care and on the world's view of osteopathic medicine.

My own achievements in the past year are modest by comparison. Yet I am proud of what the AOA has accomplished, thanks to the efforts and sacrifices of volunteers—the DOs and osteopathic medical students who serve on the AOA's departments, bureaus, committees and councils—and, in no small measure, to the knowledge and hard work of AOA staff.

As a result of our national and international advocacy and "Fit for Life"

initiatives, the AOA can claim many successes:

- helping to prevent a 10.1% cut in Medicare reimbursements to physicians that was scheduled to take effect on Jan 1.
- playing a leadership role in advancing the patient-centered medical home model of care through the Patient-Centered Primary Care Collaborative.
- securing full practice rights for DOs in Israel.
- increasing our involvement with the WHO and the International Association of Medical Regulatory Authorities to advance the interests of the osteopathic medical profession and promote worldwide health.
- as part of the Osteopathic International Alliance, participating in "Advancing Osteopathy 2008," a series of international conferences hosted by the UK General Osteopathic Council that attracted more than 1,300 DOs and osteopaths from 22 countries.
- earning kudos from the United Kingdom's Prince Charles, who is an ardent devotee of osteopathy.
- reviewing all fitness-related bills before the US Congress and drafting letters of support for bills consistent with AOA policy and our "DOs: Fit for Life" initiative.
- creating model legislation calling for daily physical education for students in kindergarten through 12th grade that state osteopathic medical associations can take to their state legislators.

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AOA President Peter B. Ajluni, DO, poses for a snapshot with Debra A. Smith, DO, outside the United Nations' European headquarters in Geneva, where they attended the World Health Organization's 61st World Health Assembly in May. (Photo by Joshua Kerr)



- holding the DOs: Fit for Life Run/Walk last fall during the 112th Annual AOA Convention and Scientific Seminar in San Diego.

- collaborating with the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association to promote health and fitness, as well as working to appoint a DO to the association's newly formed medical advisory panel.

- creating "DOs: Fit for Life Fun Run/Walk" kits for distribution to state osteopathic medical associations, osteopathic specialty societies, osteopathic medical schools and other associations serving the profession.

- serving as a sponsor of Family Health and Fitness Day USA on Sept 29, 2007, during which family fitness events, health screenings and health information workshops were held in communities throughout the United States.

- participating as a silver sponsor in the "One in a Million" challenge urging Michiganders to become more physically active—an initiative of the Michigan Governor's Council on Physical Fitness and the Sports/Michigan Fitness Foundation.

- encouraging members of osteopathic medicine's family to hold fun runs and walks in their communities.

- dedicating a \$6,000 grant from the AOA Bureau of Student Affairs to "Fit for Life" activities at osteopathic medical schools—allowing students to apply for stipends of up to \$500 per school to compete in races and other fitness activities on campus and in their communities.

### Strengthening our identity

Our visibility as a profession is increasing. Our impact on world health is increasing. We are becoming fitter physicians, both physically and mentally. Yet our profession has identity issues.

By going where no DOs had gone before, the Great Pioneers of Osteopathic Medicine helped our profession achieve parity and rapprochement with MDs. But with this acceptance and recognition has come diminished fervor for osteopathic principles and practice among some osteopathic medical students and DOs. Indeed, some want to do away with the *DO* designation, as comments on my AOA President's Blog on DO-Online have made so clear.

For a number of reasons, the majority of osteopathic medical graduates now train in allopathic residencies accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, while thousands of AOA-approved internship and residency slots remain unfilled. As a profession, we must meet this challenge and restore passion for

OPP—as the best way to promote health for all.

My successor as AOA president, Carlo J. DiMarco, DO, is making osteopathic graduate medical education the focus of his term, which begins in July. With his brilliance, energy and experience in training osteopathic ophthalmology residents, he will make strides in overcoming some of the obstacles faced by OGME, I am certain.

### Taking pride

I have learned so much from all of you during the past 12 months. Thank you for your suggestions, insights and candid feedback. It has been a great honor to lead this extraordinary profession. Be proud of A.T. Still, the other Great Pioneers of Osteopathic Medicine, and yourselves.

"You are commissioned to go wipe tears away from all faces and bring forth lives filled with strength and purpose which will make for peace," the Rev Tutu told the World Health Assembly. We can all pioneer innovations that will improve health for all.

Peter B. Ajluni, DO  
2007-08 AOA president