



Dr Wickless brings passion for policy, education, international affairs

Evidence-based leadership

CAROLYN SCHIERHORN

Born in Kirksville, Mo, in 1941, AOA President-elect Larry A. Wickless, DO, grew up believing *DO* to be synonymous with *physician*.

He spent his childhood and adolescence within 50 miles of Kirksville in New Cambria, Mo, and Unionville, Mo. Most of the physicians in northeastern Missouri were DOs, and just about every family was familiar with the country's first osteopathic medical school, what is now the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine-A.T. Still University (KCOM-ATSU), Dr Wickless notes.

As a high school student, Dr Wickless knew two osteopathic physicians in Unionville: Charles L. Judd, DO, and Lester William McDonald Sr, DO, known as "Dr Mac," the father of a friend.

"Larry Wickless' early familiarity with the profession helped give rise to his vast knowledge of the history of osteopathic medicine, which he applies to current issues," according to longtime friend Michael I. Opiari, DO, who chairs the AOA Council on Osteopathic Postdoctoral Training.

Dr Wickless' mother, Eva Wickless, taught elementary school. His father, Paul Wickless, served as a school superintendent in northern Missouri. They encouraged their son and three daughters to excel academically and spurred their interest in education.

Dr Wickless' youngest sister, Nancy Wickless Steele, is the assistant superintendent of schools in Troy, Mo. His younger sister, Barbara Wickless, PhD, who is now deceased, earned a doctorate in mathematics. And his twin sister, Linda Wickless Bornhoeft, went to nursing school after earning a degree in English.

Larry A. Wickless, DO, is congratulated by a well-wisher after being named the AOA's 2008-09 president-elect on the last day of the AOA House of Delegates' meeting in Chicago. His wife, Carole Crosby Wickless, JD (right), looks on. (Photo by Brooke Johnson)

"His family undoubtedly discussed educational issues at the dinner table," observes former AOA Trustee Max T. McKinney II, DO. "So it is not surprising that Larry's forte as a leader of the profession has been in education—in training residents and in serving on practically every AOA committee related to education."

Although he was the first in his family to go to medical school, Dr Wickless initially thought he would become an engineer. But while earning a bachelor of science degree in chemistry from what is now Truman State University in Kirksville, he decided to become an osteopathic physician. "I've always been good at mathematics, but I didn't want to do math all the time," Dr Wickless explains. Osteopathic medicine beckoned as a more interesting and fulfilling career.

Dr Wickless attended KCOM-ATSU, graduating in 1967. He was a classmate of Dr Mac's son, Lester William McDonald Jr, DO, who today practices family medicine in Cameron, Mo.

After serving a one-year internship at Doctors Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, Dr Wickless trained for three years in the internal medicine residency program at Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, Mich, and the former Zeiger Hospital in Detroit. At Botsford, he was trained by former AOA president Eugene A. Oliveri, DO, a gastroenterologist who later became Dr Wickless' professional partner. Dr Oliveri inspired Dr Wickless to pursue a GI fellowship at what is now the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

While training in Michigan, Dr Wickless met the woman who would become his wife, Carole Crosby Wickless, JD. He married her during the last year of his residency.

As the principal harpist for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Carole Wickless had strong ties to the Detroit area, so Dr Wickless returned to Michigan after completing his GI fellowship in New

Jersey to practice gastroenterology in Farmington Hills—with the Internal Medicine Clinical Group from 1972 to 1992 and with South Oakland Gastroenterology Associates from 1992 to the present.

Dr Wickless and his wife, who became a lawyer in the early 1980s, have two sons: Kevin D. Wickless, JD, and Scott C. Wickless, DO, a 2002 KCOM-ATSU graduate who recently completed a dermatopathology fellowship at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

"We encouraged our children to develop their own interests and pursue any career they wanted," Dr Wickless says, nonetheless acknowledging pride that they have followed in their parents' professional footsteps.

Penchant for training

With Dr Oliveri and Michael Biederman, DO, Dr Wickless started the gastroenterology training program at Botsford Hospital in 1977 and since then has served continuously as either the program's director or its associate director. Eventually expanding from one to six fellowship positions, the program has trained 49 GI fellows to date.

Although gastroenterologists do not typically perform osteopathic manipulative treatment, osteopathic principles and practice influence Dr Wickless' approach to patient care and training. "You take care of the whole person," Dr Wickless says. "For instance, I've always required trainees to obtain a social history of each patient, which always gives you additional information that allows you to make better evaluation and management decisions."

A clinical professor of medicine at the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine in East Lansing since the mid-1980s, Dr Wickless has instructed trainees across the continuum of osteopathic medical education—students, interns, residents and fellows,

notes Dr Opipari, a retired former director of osteopathic education and medical affairs for Henry Ford Health System in Detroit.

"Larry understands all facets of medical education and its role in the survival of our profession," Dr Opipari emphasizes.

"Few people realize how much Larry Wickless has done for all osteopathic interns and residents, not just those training in gastroenterology," adds cardiologist Robert J. Stomel, DO, who practiced with Dr Wickless for nearly 15 years. "At a time when the osteopathic medical profession's graduate medical training programs were dwindling, he and Dr Opipari arguably did more to strengthen osteopathic graduate medical education [OGME] than did any other leaders in the profession."

Specialty, state service

A member of the American College of Osteopathic Internists (ACOI) for the past 40 years, Dr Wickless served on its Board of Directors from 1982 to 1992 and as its 1990-91 president. With much experience on ACOI committees related to strategic planning, bylaws and government relations, Dr Wickless helped chart a new course for the society—hiring Brian Donadio, an executive director with considerable advocacy experience, and moving the ACOI from Florida to the Washington, DC, area so it would have more impact at the federal level, for example.

Dr Wickless did not initially set out to be a leader in organized medicine. "I simply liked doing the job at hand and doing it well," he says. "My goal has always been to leave an organization a better organization than when I started."

A member of the Michigan Osteopathic Association (MOA) since 1968, Dr Wickless became the founding chairman of the MOA Membership Committee in 1994, and he remains a mentor of this committee. Largely due to Dr Wick-

less' efforts, MOA membership increased by more than 48% from 1994 to 2000, according to Dennis Paradis, MPH, the MOA's executive director. One strategy Dr Wickless initiated has been to focus on recruiting interns and residents.

The MOA's 1999-2000 president, Dr Wickless has served on the MOA Council on Government Affairs since 2000 and has been an adviser to the MOA Intern-Resident Committee since 2002. He began serving in the MOA House of Delegates in 1985 and in the AOA House of Delegates in 1989.

"I've known Larry Wickless for 20 years," says Carl M. Pesta, DO, who is the speaker of both the MOA House and the AOA House. "His most striking trait is his attention to minutiae. He is very detail-minded."

Dr Stomel concurs. "I've served on many committees with Dr Wickless," says the former president of both the MOA and the ACOI. "I've never been to a committee meeting where he was not fully prepared."

"Larry Wickless has a keen intellect and is very intellectually honest," adds AOA Immediate Past President Peter B. Ajluni, DO, who served as the MOA's 1990-91 president. "He is a hard worker and is very data-driven."

Dr Wickless agrees that he is detail-oriented. "You have to collect data and let data drive your argument," he insists.

National involvement

A leader in the AOA since the early 1990s, Dr Wickless earns praise from his peers for significant contributions in government and policy, educational affairs and international affairs.

"Larry Wickless has a wealth of experience in advocacy issues, educational issues and international issues," Dr Ajluni notes. "He is one of the best-prepared trustees to become president-elect."

An inaugural AOA health policy fellow in 1994-95, Dr Wickless was a member of what is now the AOA Bureau of

Federal Health Programs from 1992 to 2000 and served as its vice chairman from 1995 to 2000.

Before his election to the AOA Board of Trustees in 2000, Dr Wickless also served as the vice chairman of the precursor to the AOA Commission on Osteopathic College Accreditation and as the vice chairman of the committee on student affairs. In 1999, he chaired the 10th Osteopathic Medical Education Leadership Conference sponsored by the AOA and the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine.

While serving on the AOA Board, Dr Wickless has chaired the Department of Educational Affairs, the Bureau of Membership and the Bureau of AOA Constitution and Bylaws. And he has served as the vice chairman of many task forces related to training and certification.

"Larry does not take a position on issues without having a clear understanding of the issues," Dr Opipari notes, describing Dr Wickless' style of leadership. "He always is willing to ask questions and to learn."

Dr Wickless has acquired depth of knowledge and experience in his areas of leadership, Dr Stomel points out, noting that he has been more focused than many other AOA leaders. "Larry Wickless focused first on improving OGME and then on explaining osteopathic medical education to people in other countries across the world," Dr Stomel says.

"Larry's experience in OGME and international affairs are of great benefit to me during my presidency," AOA President Carlo J. DiMarco, DO, adds. "His expertise in membership and continuing medical education issues are also very valuable.

"When given a job, Larry gets it done. I'm very fortunate to have him serving as president-elect."

International affairs

Dr Wickless' international leadership emerged in the late 1990s. In 1997, he

became the founding chairman of what is now the AOA Bureau of International Osteopathic Medical Education and Affairs (BIOMEA), which advocates for practice rights for US-trained DOs in foreign countries.

"At the time BIOMEA was being formed, Dr Wickless was an AOA leader in educational affairs with a real interest in international osteopathic medicine," recalls consultant W. Douglas Ward, PhD, who served as the AOA's director of education from 1977 to 1993. "He had already developed contacts outside of the United States—in Canada and in Europe."

Praising Dr Wickless as a visionary, Dr Ward notes that he was less concerned about how BIOMEA would be funded than were some other leaders in the profession.

"Dr Wickless insisted that BIOMEA be properly organized and that it focus on appropriate priorities," Dr Ward elaborates. "He was determined that if it could prove its worth, then funding would ultimately follow."

BIOMEA initially concentrated on expanding practice rights for US-trained DOs in Canada and on enhancing the role of the AOA in the international medical community. To that end, Dr Wickless had contact with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Pan American Health Organization and other international organizations.

"My involvement in international affairs evolved out of the AOA's dealings with the WHO," Dr Wickless recounts. "But I have always had an interest in international issues. I have traveled a lot and have taken courses in gastroenterology and liver disease internationally."

As the AOA became more active internationally, BIOMEA began to see the need for a separate organization that would champion both practice rights for US-trained osteopathic physicians and international guidelines on basic safety

Susan Rose, DO (from left), AOA President-elect Larry A. Wickless, DO, 2007-08 AOA President Peter B. Ajluni, DO, and Martin Crane, MD, gather on June 16 just before a meeting between the AOA and the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) of the United States.

Dr Rose is a former treasurer of the FSMB, and Dr Crane is the FSMB's chairman-elect. (Photo by Patrick Sinco)



and training in osteopathy. In 2003, Dr Wickless became chairman of the Steering Committee of the Osteopathic International Alliance (OIA).

"The OIA grew out of a realization by Dr Wickless and BIOMEA that a broad-based osteopathic multinational organization was needed to address certain issues within the world medical and health community," Dr Ward recalls. "Dr Wickless was the logical choice to lead the formation of the OIA. By this time, he had numerous contacts and acquaintances in the osteopathic physician and osteopathy communities of many countries. He had also developed a high level of trust and respect as a leader in the international osteopathic movement."

Dr Wickless has chaired the OIA since its incorporation in 2005. Today, the OIA is a coalition of 43 osteopathic organizations representing US-trained DOs, internationally trained osteopaths who meet high training standards, and foreign-trained MDs who have additional training in osteopathic principles and manual medicine.

"As the chairman of the OIA, Dr Wickless has been able to represent American interests while building trust among both osteopath and osteopathic physician groups," notes Debra A. Smith, DO, a member of BIOMEA who served on the OIA's founding Board of Directors. "This was not an easy task as there were concerns about the motives for starting such an organization. However,

these concerns were overcome by finding points of agreement, namely advocating for the highest goals and aspirations for osteopath and osteopathic physician groups."

Presidential potential

"Dr Wickless has the courage to use his integrity to advance our profession," emphasizes Dr Smith, the chief medical officer for International Medical Group, a global health and travel insurer in Indianapolis. "Ten years ago, many asked why the AOA should look beyond the United States.

"Today, with more than 40% of osteopathic medical students doing international rotations, more osteopathic physicians going on medical missions and schools like the Edward Via Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine in Blacksburg dedicated to medical missions, it has become apparent why our profession should expand practice rights and recognition for American DOs and participate in international health policymaking."

Will Dr Wickless focus his presidency on international affairs, education or some other priority for the profession? Dr Wickless isn't ready to disclose his pres-

idential plans. But he acknowledges that "the management of change and looking to the future" will be central to his presidency.

"Larry Wickless is honest, ethical, sincere, dedicated and committed to this profession," Dr Opipari stresses. "He will be an informed and involved leader at all levels.

"Larry will present the AOA and the osteopathic medical profession in the most professional and respectable manner possible."

"I predict he will be an outstanding president," Dr Ajluni agrees.

The MOA's 1997-98 president, Dr McKinney has known Dr Wickless since 1970. He sums up the president-elect's personality this way: "Larry likes to say, 'Some day, let's go fishing. We could solve a lot of problems on the boat while we're fishing.'

"Larry is a laid-back guy, but he has the tenacity of a bulldog. He won't let a subject drop if he has a passion for it."

AOA

Carolyn Schierhorn is the senior editorial project manager in the AOA Department of Publications.