

DOCTORS OF DISTINCTION

Creating Normal Lives

In nearly 20 years of cleft palate and lip surgery, Allan Perry, Jr., MD, gives underserved kids a chance to live like everyone else, often on his own dime.

It's tempting to think that the White Memorial Medical Center Cleft Palate Program's move to a bigger, more up-to-date space in the East Los Angeles Rainbow Children's Center for Healthy Growth would represent a kind of culmination of Medical Director Allan Perry, Jr., MD's nearly 20 years of vital reparative work. But White Memorial President and CEO Beth Zachary practically scoffs. "I wouldn't call it a culmination," she says. "He watches these kids grow up and he knows their names ... he's real happy to have a better place to see his kids, but for him this is not a culmination," says Zachary. "When he sees those kids getting better, and the little babies that can't even suck and eat when they're born ... what Allan works here for is to get that kid so it can eat, it's healthy, it looks good, it's a normal kid, normal life—that's what Allan works for, not for a new center."

Dr. Perry didn't purposefully guide his career toward reparative cosmetic surgery, but growing up with volunteering Seventh-Day Adventist parents might have had something to do with it. Eventually though, he settled on that track, and since then he's been a steadfast ally to kids who need help to live a normal life—especially children who don't have the means to afford it.

At eight years old, Allan Perry, Jr., accompanied his parents on a medical mission to Kenya. For five years, Allan Perry, Sr., MD, and his wife, MaryLou, worked at Kendu Mission Hospital on the Kendu Bay of Lake Victoria, with young Allan eventually attending the Adventist Maxwell Preparatory School in Nairobi for three-month stretches. The "hospital had, I think, about a hundred beds, and there were initially two physicians, and my dad ended up being the medical director for the last few years that we were there," the younger Dr. Perry recalls. "I was in a position to go with him on trips to outlying dispensaries, where he would see patients," he says. Standing at the operating room window, young Allan Perry developed an interest in medicine and surgery.

After medical school at Loma Linda

University and general surgery training at White Memorial, Dr. Perry could still have taken any route in the profession. "Again, it's my father's fault," he jokes. A Glendale plastic surgeon and private pilot, Dr. Perry,



> Dr. Allan Perry, Jr.'s, love of helping kids is evident in the cleft palate program he directs at White Memorial. Dr. Perry poses beside Santa at the kids' Christmas party.

Sr., volunteered with Liga International, which organizes medical missions to Mexico. In the states of Sinaloa and Sonora, the senior Dr. Perry did a lot of cleft lip and palate surgeries, while Allan, Jr., performed other essential duties. "I went as sort-of support staff, being the beast of burden, carrying stuff and running errands," he says. "As I went further along in my training, I was able to sit down and assist him in those surgeries, and that was where I got my first exposure to cleft lip and palate."

Eventually realizing that he liked plastic surgery better than the orthopedic surgery he'd intended to pursue, Dr. Perry completed his residency in plastic surgery and joined his father's Glendale practice in 1989. Had that not happened, White Memorial might be without its cleft palate program. "When I first came and joined my dad, I tried to set up a program [at White Memorial] and got a lot of verbal support," he says. But try as he might, Dr. Perry kept running up against a wall, as he puts it.

In the mid-1990s, Libby Wilson, MD, left Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center in Downey when the hospital cut her cleft palate program due to budgetary constraints. As Beth Zachary tells it, Dr. Perry jumped at the chance, saying: "You know what? We have the chance to do this. Let's offer to take that program from Rancho, bring Dr. Wilson here, and keep that program at White." He also credits Jack Vanore, MD, but Zachary says, "He pretty much single-handedly figured that out."

When Dr. Wilson left White Memorial around five years later, the hospital proposed to Dr. Perry that he take over the program. Now nearly nine years in operation, the program has treated more than 400 kids, with about 250 currently active. It has five full-time workers—two in the front office, a nurse practitioner, and two speech therapists—while two other plastic surgeons work in conjunction with Dr. Perry, along with an ear-nose-throat specialist, an occupational and feeding specialist, social workers, dentists, orthodontists and dental prosthetists.

At the same time, it's important to point out that cleft lip and palate repair isn't the highest paying endeavor—Dr. Perry's cosmetic surgery in Glendale makes his cleft palate work possible. White Memorial graciously helps the program with staff and space. "Most of the kids have nothing, or they have Medi-Cal or [California Children's Services], which pay minimal amounts, so it's certainly not something that you can support yourself [with] or fill your retirement account with," he says.

When he has the chance, Dr. Perry likes to scuba dive and ride a tandem bike with his wife, Helen, and he daydreams about lowering his golf index. Together, he and his wife have raised a son who's a junior in high school and a daughter who's a junior at New York University, which are big accomplishments in themselves. Professionally, even modest Dr. Perry calls the Cleft Palate Program's move to the Rainbow Center "a giant step" for the program. Just don't call it a culmination.

—Chris Womack