

# Doctor's duty to serve key to helping people in need

By Tucker W. Wade

For Dr. Robert Riikola, providing quality healthcare has nothing to do with the healthcare plan you have.

"I rarely ever look at someone's insurance plan when treating them, they are just another patient," Dr. Riikola said.

Serving patients on the MEMPHIS Plan since 1991, Dr. Riikola has shown that he truly cares about the community. He is a citizen-physician, and one of many volunteers who has provided care to those who might otherwise not receive it.

"Dr. Riikola has been a Church Health Center volunteer for more than 20 years," said Church Health Center Founder and Executive Director Dr. Scott Morris. "He has seen hundreds of children both in his office and in our clinic. He's served on our board and given me free strokes on the golf course. He cares deeply about the children of Memphis and the work of the Church Health Center, and he is an exceedingly good person."

For more than 39 years, Dr. Riikola has practiced pediatrics at the Memphis Children's Clinic, a mainstay in the pediatric community which has grown to 32 physicians in six different offices. A University of Tennessee Medical School alumnus, Dr. Riikola loves the collegial atmosphere at his Clinic, adding that there is not a lot of competitiveness nor uncertainty between other pediatricians when it comes to serving those in need.

According to Dr. Riikola, there is a built-in understanding and obligation amongst many of his colleagues to help those in need.

For 20 years now, and with a total of more than 1,400 businesses and more than 4,000 people on the program, the MEMPHIS Plan covers a broad swath of the area's working uninsured population of people who work in a myriad of trades, from wholesalers to restaurants to the self-employed.

"Dr. Morris is the world's best salesman," said Dr. Riikola. "But the Plan speaks for itself, and it melds into my practice very easily."

For the Whitehaven-based physician, working with community providers has been instrumental in serving the needs of his patients. With help from many significant healthcare players in the area, those in need of additional medical attention are cared for.

"I'm committed to the full spectrum of care for my patients," Dr. Riikola said. "The Church Health Center and other hospitals do a great service for those in need of quality, affordable healthcare."

Iva has been taking her son to Dr. Riikola for years and speaks very positively about their experiences.

"It wasn't just his medical advice that made him a good doctor," Iva said. "It was his inclusive attitude coupled with comforting anecdotes and friendly advice, which was most endearing. When my friends ask me where I hear about these great markdowns at Wal-Mart, I say my son's doctor!"

Looking back, Dr. Riikola says he never saw his career as necessarily mission-oriented.

“But I most certainly do what I can professionally to help those from varying backgrounds ó those most in need.”

Never one to boast, Dr. Riikola dismissed his work with the MEMPHIS Plan as nothing more than his duty to serve.

Integrity not only defines doctors like Dr. Robert Riikola, but other participating physicians as well. Thanks to many doctors and others in our community, the MEMPHIS Plan continues to help those in need.

*Tucker W. Wade is a Church Health Scholar at the Church Health Center of Memphis where he is currently researching healthcare and quality cost benchmarks amongst the city patient and provider community. Wade recently graduated with honors from the College of the Holy Cross in Massachusetts and plans to pursue a career in healthcare law.*