3 generations of good hands

Dr. Dick Clark retires, 28-years a surgeon

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OF THE NORTHWESTERN

Dr. Dick Clark remembers as a child following his father on surgical rounds at Mercy Medical Center. The doting child later became a surgeon at the hospital himself, walking in footsteps he said he is honored to follow.

“We have a strong, rich family history that I’m quite proud of,” Clark said.

On Monday, Clark, 62, will retire after 28 years at Mercy, the last day of more than 100 years and three generations of surgeons from his family to work with the healthcare provider.

The hospital’s history dates back to 1891, when a group from Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother from Germany came to Oshkosh and built St. Mary’s Hospital.

It was at that hospital, at the corner of Merritt Avenue and Boyd Street, where Clark’s grandfather, Dr. Burton Clark, began his service as a surgeon in 1894. The group of nuns later took over Lakeside Hospital by Menominee Park, which they renamed Mercy Hospital, and then moved to the new facility on Oakwood Road in 2000.

The elder Clark was initially dissuaded from the medical profession by his father, Benjamin Franklin Clark, saying it was a waste of a good farmer.

B.F. Clark was not wary of higher education though, as he sent three of his daughters to college, a highly uncommon move in that time period. The elder Clark simply reasoned that farming provided security in that period of American history while the medical field did not.

Burton Clark persevered though, at times performing surgeries on kitchen tables when a call came from far away.

In 1906, William Clark was born, who continued the surgical legacy, working at the hospital from 1932-1974. His medical expertise was highly respected, but for some patients it was more than his knowledge of medicine that helped.

Marion Batura of Oshkosh was treated by William Clark in 1961, and said Clark actually helped save her marriage, which was troubled at the time.

When Batura first visited the hospital with Hodgkin’s disease, Clark diagnosed Batura’s problem as being stress-related. Hodgkin’s disease was not widely known at the time, and a proper diagnosis was later made.

To help defray some of Batura’s stress though, Clark privately spoke with Batura’s husband, George.

“He simply said, ‘I feel this is caused by stress, if you don’t want to lose her...’” Batura said.

The talk, which Batura, 73, said she was not told of until a few years ago, led to a change in her husband.

“Life was different then, somehow being told that, basically he (my husband) cared a lot about me,” Batura said.

Years later, Batura came into contact with Dick Clark after George Batura suffered a hand injury while working under his truck.

“It was a very traumatic thing to go through,” Batura said. “Because he was tapped under his truck, it was a very trying time, and Dr. Clark was very calming and just did a good job.”

The 60-hour work weeks will end after Clark performs his last surgery Friday, and leaves his office on Monday. Clark said he

DR. DICK CLARK scrubs up before one of his final surgeries at Mercy Medical Center where he has been practicing since 1966.

BURTON CLARK, WILLIAM CLARK, DICK CLARK

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doesn't know what he's going to do with the extra time now, but said he wanted to leave at the top of his career.

While Clark will be missed, he is assured that his patients will be left in good hands.

Last summer, Dr. Michael Foley joined Clark and two other surgeons in the general, vascular and cardiothoracic surgery office in the hospital. When Clark leaves at the end of the day Monday, it will again offer the services of three doctors, two of which have Oshkosh legacies of their own.

Dr. Robert S. McDonald and Dr. Robert Weber both have three generations of family members in medicine. Despite his own background, McDonald said when he first came to the hospital ten years ago, Clark served as a mentor.

"He's a tremendous surgeon, an excellent teacher and just been a great guy to have as a mentor," McDonald said.

While his departure is marked with sadness, Clark also carries a sense of pride as he goes, knowing the history that he is a part of.

"It's the best job in the world, I feel so fortunate to have been able to do this," Clark said.

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