

My Turn

Holy Cross Hospital, up close and personal

Stephen Walling

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One of the co-founders of the Mayo Clinic, and an associate of the Mayo brothers, was Dr. Henry Plummer. He was responsible for introducing or contributing to many of the procedures and techniques that came to characterize modern medical practice, including sterilization by steam under pressure, rapid air exchange systems to limit airborne diseases in the hospital, and innovative uses of X-ray to enhance its diagnostic capability. He, also, collaborated with Franklin Ellerbe to design the second generation Mayo Clinic building, opened in 1927 and still standing in Rochester, Minnesota today. It set the standard for hospital and clinic design for the next 40 years.

At his home, now a museum operated by the city of Rochester, he built a photographic laboratory where he developed processes later used by Eastman Kodak. He was, also, very absent-minded.

The story is told that one evening he and his wife were heading to Minneapolis for a concert when they stopped for gas. His wife got out of the car to visit the restroom. He was about halfway to the twin cities when he realized that he was alone.

I encountered all this history, and much more, when I was studying hypertension and blood vessel disease at the Mayo Clinic as a senior student enrolled at Texas Tech Medical School in Lubbock in the mid-70s. Because Texas Tech was a new medical school, it had not yet developed the infrastructure of medical education appropriate to a senior medical student, so we spent most of that last year at other teaching institutions.

In addition to the Mayo Clinic, I completed externships (as opposed to internships, which one does after graduating medical school) at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, and Ben Taub and Methodist Hospitals in Houston, where I served on Dr. Michael DeBakey's cardiovascular surgery service. Then, after graduating, I took my training in internal medicine at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. I can truthfully say I have served in some of the finest hospitals in the world.

My wife and I bought our home in Taos in 2014 and are now living here full time. Recently, I required admission to Holy Cross Hospital for a problem that, eventually, required surgery. In all of those hospitals cited above I never encountered a higher level of professionalism or a more caring attitude than was displayed by the physicians, nurses and staff of Holy Cross Taos.

And I don't believe I got any "special treatment" because I am a doctor. My observation was that the same excellent care was provided to all.

A hospital the size of Holy Cross does not, and should not, offer, some services. However, for the vast majority of medical and surgical issues that people encounter, Taos Holy Cross Hospital is a great asset, richly deserving of the support of our community.

Dr. Stephen Walling is a retired physician in Taos.

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