

Academic Note

Health Care's Paperless Future

BY KEN MA

Both doctors recall instructors who shaped their thinking about medicine.

Cyril Blavo, D.O., now professor of pediatrics and public health at NSU, taught Steven Seltzer the importance of a differential diagnosis, considering every disease a symptom might be, not just the most likely or prevalent. "Dr. Blavo taught us to think differently," Seltzer said. "When someone comes in with shortness of breath, it's thinking beyond upper respiratory infection. Is it heart or kidney failure? Is it something else? The art of differential diagnosis is being affected today because of the heavy reliance on tests."

Both doctors also fondly remember histology teacher Lori Dribin, Ph.D., now assistant dean of student affairs for the College of Medical Sciences. "Dr. Dribin made learning fun," said Rowena Seltzer, of the class that focuses on the study of cells, tissues, and organs. "She took a difficult subject and made it seem easier than it was."

Dribin recalls the Seltzers, saying that both were a pleasure to teach. Her histology lessons stand out to students, she said, because, "I try to make it fun. I try to reduce the stress. Everything is so serious. It's really a performance if you want to keep students engaged. It's my comedy routine."

In addition to his busy private practice, Steven Seltzer is part of the health team on Bay News 9, working behind the scenes, editing, and fact checking, as well as on-camera, presenting hot-button health stories for the program, which is broadcast on the Bright House network. "I really enjoy it because it's patient education," he said. "I find it adds depth to your practice, but more importantly, it's a great way to do community service. And when you are researching stories, you sometimes are learning while you are presenting."

Steven Seltzer sees the future of medicine tied to prevention and motivating patients to take charge of their health care. The old model of a doctor being like a parent is outdated, he said.

"Diseases don't change that much," he said. "In my years of experience I've worked on trying to understand why people often ignore their health, yet have health insurance. What makes the difference is getting them onboard with you, to take their medication, and to be proactive in their own health, care and prevention." ■

Imagine if your physician could access all of your medical records from a Blackberry or an iPhone. There won't be a need to track down messy notes and manila folders to find out if you were previously treated for cancer or have neglected your routine physical check up for years. Approximately 100,000 people in the United States die each year as a result of medical errors. Thanks to a federal government mandate, electronic medical records will be a reality throughout the country by 2014.

Nova Southeastern University's College of Osteopathic Medicine (COM) is leading the charge to educate future doctors and health care professionals about paperless medical records. The Master of Science in Biomedical Informatics (M.S.B.I.) program trains students to effectively use information technology in health care, and develop and implement an electronic medical records system. The 43-credit program, which is the only such program being offered at a Florida medical school, also offers certificates in clinical medical informatics and public health informatics. This is a separate graduate program that is not part of the Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.) curriculum. Nor do you need to be a medical student to take this separate master's degree. The students enrolled in the Biomedical Informatics program come from many fields including management, education, and information technology, even practicing physicians brushing up on their skills.

"Biomedical informatics, which is an emerging field, serves as the bridge between health care and technology," said Jennie Lou, M.D., M.Sc., the medical school professor who heads NSU's biomedical informatics program. ■

